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“YOU DON’T SPEAK CORRECT ENGLISH”: TEACHER KNOWLEDGE ABOUT  
LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY/LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ITS ROLE IN  
PEDAGOGY

BY

ALICE YUAN-SHING LEE

DISSERTATION

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Doctoral Committee:

Professor Violet J. Harris, Chair  
Associate Professor Eurydice Bauer, Director of Research  
Professor Anne H. Dyson  
Associate Professor Karla J. Möller

## Abstract

This dissertation is a qualitative multi-case study of in-service teachers Sara and Raniya and pre-service teacher Tiera (all pseudonyms), who varied in grade level and experience in teaching. The purpose of the study was to investigate teacher knowledge of linguistic diversity, particularly African American Language. This study is foregrounded by the language of *all* students and the ways teachers enact knowledge about this topic in their classrooms. Language is, after all, a foundation for all learning; academic content, assessment and instruction are conveyed via oral, written and/or literary language. If student academic profiles hinge on competency of the language used/accepted in the classroom, much attention must be prioritized to student language, teacher knowledge about student language, and the way these entities manifest in the classroom. My cases, then, are instantiations of the larger phenomenon I seek to explore: teacher knowledge about language diversity and its role in pedagogy.

The three cases were situated in a small urban community, nearby a Midwest university, and were selected through a process of surveys and initial interviews. Observations of each teacher spanned two to three months, with an aim to document the role of teachers' linguistic knowledge as it played out in curriculum, pedagogy, and student interaction. Data were analyzed through a process of open and selected thematic coding. In my journey to tease out what knowledge my participants had about this topic, and the meaning of such knowledge in their lives as teachers, I found that experiences did not fit “neatly” within categories. They, in fact, intersected, enhanced, and meshed into one another. Still, after loosely categorizing them, I questioned what experiences “counted” as sources for “real” knowledge. Particularly, what role do personal

experiences play in knowledge construction? Attempts to trace the manifestation of their knowledge in the classroom were not as linear a process as I had anticipated either. It was in this process, however, that I began to consider not just *what* teachers know, but *what counts* as knowledge, and *how* they come to know at all.

These new inquiries helped me develop a theoretical frame that I propose in this dissertation and served as a significant finding in this project. This framing is a view of teachers as embodied toolkits, in which pedagogy is interpreted as a teacher's *lived* work, and an enactment of one's myriad life experiences. My approach dismantles traditional notions of a toolkit, where a text or resource is emphasized as the "expert" source of pedagogy, or in other cases, perceived as an appendage of strategies with which the teacher periodically consults. This approach helped me understand the role Sara's academic, professional, and, especially, personal life experiences played in her development of a racially conscious curriculum that sought to build students' racial identities and awareness. Interpreting Raniya as an embodied toolkit helped me see how her academic and professional experiences involving language acquisition were lived out in her classroom assessment and advocacy for culturally and linguistically diverse students among her staff. Tiera's multi-faceted experiences, and particularly upbringing, played a role in shaping her teaching philosophy, and how those experiences were manifested in her practices regarding AAL, curriculum enhancement, and rapport with students. This view of teachers pushes back on current ideologies underpinning professional development, teacher education, mandated curriculum selection processes, and policies regarding teacher evaluation.



*To my mother, who taught me I have a voice,  
and it is to be used to say something.*

*To my father, who showed me there are  
purposes greater than ourselves to live for.*

*To my husband, who listens and talks with me everyday.*

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exist without the work of Anne Dyson, for many reasons. It was in her language class I first learned about dialect diversity and began the exploration of language in the lives of my students. Under her guidance and personal care for me, these events changed the trajectory of my career and research. Professors Karla J. Möller and Eury Bauer greatly encouraged me in my writing and scholarship, sparking belief and agency during times I most doubted myself. Their work and feedback made valuable contributions to the completion of my program and this project.

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# **CHAPTER 1**

## **INTRODUCTION**

As a full-time elementary school teacher for the majority of my doctoral program, I have been privy to two sets of classrooms—in public schools and within the university. My doctoral coursework served as the greatest professional development in my classroom, providing me a theoretical framework to interpret, understand, and plan for student learning. Conceptions of language acquisition and linguistic diversity not only enriched my literacy curriculum and instruction, but it helped me see each child, and the culture, history, and experiences shaping her/him into a literate being. Access to both sets of classrooms, simultaneously, and over time, provided me opportunities to bring the realities of each context into the other. It is the result of these multiple intersections where this project begins. During my third year in the program, I enrolled in a language class that introduced me to a variety of topics around language diversity. One subject, African American Language (AAL) and its linguistic legitimacy, was a topic I had never encountered in my 20 years of official schooling. Accepting, observing, and understanding the dialect, and its role in the lives of my students in formal education was a process, and one that I was anxious to share with other teachers where I worked.

One conversation, which will forever be burned in my memory, was with a literacy coach at that time. Anxious to share my new learning, I told her about AAL and our need to address linguistic differences within our classrooms. Her response, one that I will never forget, was that that language was acceptable for their homes but should not be allowed in schools. In hopes that, perhaps, this incidence was a fluke, I sought out other teachers, others whom I respected, to investigate just what people thought about this topic.

I was shocked, and discouraged, to discover that the conversation I had with the literacy coach was, in fact, representative of conversations with other teachers. Increasingly, I became attuned to how we addressed and spoke to AAL speaking students, from cutting them off mid-sentence and making them “say it right,” to telling them in the hallways, “you’re not speaking correct English.” Degrading the language was really a degradation of the child. On days that I rushed off to the university for class right after work, and the “norm” of *that* classroom was built on decades of research valuing diverse children, I wondered how such contrary realms could exist within ten miles of each other. It was out of frustration, sadness, and finally, hope, that I conceived of a project that would address this very issue.

### **Background of the Study**

My experiences with teacher knowledge and preparedness about teaching diverse populations, especially Black students, are not new. Ladson-Billings (2000) has pointed out that teachers are rarely prepared to teach African American students. Effective pre-service teacher preparation would include exposure to African American communities, self-reflective writing through autobiography, and the ways home and school culture are incongruent. She argued for admission procedures, course work, and field experiences to be augmented in order to effectively prepare pre-service teachers to teach African American students. Darling-Hammond (2000) has also linked the quality of teachers to the education of African American students, citing work from Sanders and Rivers (1996) that found students with less qualified teachers over consecutive years suffered academically; these students tended to be African American. Weddington (2010), too,

has proposed that the quality of teachers, as well as the cultural differences between home and school were contributors to a continued Black-White achievement gap.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) documents student achievement in math and reading among fourth and eighth grade students. Between 1990 and 2013, results showed that when compared with White, Hispanic, and Asian students, African American students scored lowest in both math and reading among fourth and eighth grade students. When comparing the 2013 fourth and eighth grade reading scores between Black and White students with the 2011 results, none of the fifty states narrowed the achievement gap; in Ohio, the gap widened for fourth grade students, and in Colorado, the gap widened for eighth grade students. Most recent fourth grade reading scores in 2013 show a 32-point achievement gap between Black and White students, similar to the gap in 2003. These scores also reveal Black students scoring the lowest percentage in proficient reading scores—14% compared to their Asian (59%), White (46%), and Hispanic (18%) counterparts (NCES, 2013). The achievement gap for fourth grade vocabulary scores comparing Black (7%) and White (72%) students scoring above the 75<sup>th</sup> percentile showed a 65% difference (NCES, 2012). When comparing the Black-White reading achievement in fourth grade NAEP scores, large, urban cities had a higher average gap—30 points compared to the nation’s average 25-point gap. However, large cities such as the District of Columbia and Atlanta revealed much larger gaps—64 points and 48 points, respectively (NCES, 2011). These numbers, however, do not tell the whole story.

African American students coming from varied cultural experiences may possess the types of background knowledge not valued in high-stakes, standardized tests.

Students speaking devalued dialects, such as AAL, experience a mismatch between language used at home and at school (Heath, 1982; Genishi & Dyson, 2009; Michaels, 2006). Yet teachers, schools, and others within the field of education, do not acknowledge the linguistic legitimacy of such dialects (Hollie, 2001; Jonsberg, 2001). While AAL speakers and African American students are not the same populations, the language has historically been tied to race, and there continues to be overlap between the groups. Nonetheless, AAL continues to be one of the most marginalized dialects, and based on data cited above, the Black-White achievement gap persists as well. While schools cannot solve the endemic racism in society at large, it is one very important institution that can make a difference in the lives of Black youth. Teachers and their attitudes play a role in fostering “dialectally diverse classrooms,” which can have an impact on African American student achievement (Godley, Sweetland, Wheeler, Minnici, & Carpenter, 2006, p. 31).

Inquiries into programs addressing teacher education for diverse populations have been made. Weddington (2010) examined various programmatic models that have considered cultural differences and diminished the effects of the achievement gap within their contexts. Characteristic features among these models included: teacher education programs that value quality pedagogy, teachers engaged in culturally relevant practices, honoring AAL in classrooms, modeling communicative competence in what many consider “standard English,” (but will be referred to as the Language of Wider Communication, LWC, from this point on), and schools connected to their communities and focused on high expectations. Rather than viewing AAL speaking students as those with a cultural and language deficit, Weddington advocated for an examination of the



teacher and for consideration of the effective strategies educators have used to view African American students and their culture as resources. Other programs, such as The Linguistic Affirmation Program (LAP), have sought to fight negative perceptions and address achievement problems (Hollie, 2001).

González and Darling-Hammond (2000) have examined the extent to which some programs are preparing pre-service teachers for linguistically diverse populations. They found that most pre-service programs perpetuated a disjointed view of language, with courses on second-language learning as “add-ons” rather than integrally tied to the program. Additionally, they found that pre-service programs rarely fostered understandings of the relationship between first and second language learning or a contextualized view of language within culture. Among those, however, that did foster cultural awareness and reflection throughout field experiences, were the University of Minnesota and San Diego State University. For both pre-service and in-service teachers, these programs also built a theoretical knowledge of language that adopted pedagogical approaches conducive for ELLs.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Given the educational backdrop of a persistent Black-White achievement gap, the lack of teacher preparedness in serving culturally and linguistically diverse populations continues to be a problem. Even more problematic is the lack of linguistic legitimacy AAL has in schools. Universal screeners, like AIMSweb testing, used to test reading fluency and determine “reading level” and tiered instruction, do not acknowledge the syntactic variations found in AAL or other dialects, devalued or accepted. Over forty years ago, Goodman and Buck (1973) found that discriminatory views held by the

teacher were a major factor when examining reading proficiency among AAL speakers. Today, racist practices continue to track AAL speaking students and degrade the resources these students bring. This project, however, does not seek to blame or diminish the work of teachers, as it would be too simplistic to name them as the sole responsibility of problem (though this has not deterred policymakers and other wealthy businessmen from doing so). But language is, after all, a foundation for all learning; academic content, assessment and instruction are conveyed via oral, written and/or literary language. If student academic profiles hinge on competency of the language used/accepted in the classroom, much attention must be prioritized to student language, teacher knowledge about student language, and the way these entities manifest in the classroom. Therefore, this project recognizes the significant role a teacher plays in the classroom and student learning. If teacher preparation regarding language diversity is needed, what is also needed is critical look at current teacher education programs and professional development endeavors. What underlying ideologies do we have about teachers and their learning, even within the field of education?

Professional development for teachers often aims to “teach” teachers how to use mandated curricula, structured in the form of hours of direct instruction. Underpinning this type of “development” emphasizes a tool *outside* the teacher as the expert, rather than developing *the teacher* as the greatest tool in the classroom. Even teachers, themselves, often view their knowledge as an appendage, or “toolkit” of strategies that they draw from to teach. The term “toolkit” has been widely used in educational and political settings, and there are undergirding perceptions of teacher knowledge implicated by this term. From a quick Google search of “toolkits for teachers,” the top website that

appeared was called, “The Teacher Toolkit.” This website had lists of “tools” that were lesson ideas with downloadable templates, and can be used in the classroom to provide assistance for the teacher. In more extreme forms, prescriptive curricula mandated by school districts become, essentially, mandated toolkits. What is problematic about this approach on teaching is the dependence on the toolkit for instructional knowledge. But how can an inanimate object hold or do anything? It is the teacher who must first read the traditional toolkit, and only through her interpretation, judgment and implementation, does its content transfer to the students in her classroom. Movements, then, to standardize curriculum, and, in effect, standardize teachers do not account for all the ways a *teacher* is at the center of a toolkit. Professional development aimed at controlling/standardizing teacher instruction places value on what a toolkit “knows” over teacher knowledge. A traditional toolkit, in fact, cannot know anything; it is merely a symbolic representation for what can be powerful in the hands of a teacher. Even in some scholarly work, such as Fennema and Franke’s (1992) study of how teacher knowledge impacts math pedagogy, models suggested for understanding teacher knowledge include knowledge of content, pedagogy, learner’s cognition, and teacher beliefs. In this light, teachers are viewed from a thin, single-stranded lens; their knowledge is defined within the confines of the classroom. Even then, external resources and materials trump what accumulated knowledge they bring. A thick, multi-stranded view of teachers, however, considers the historical and social accumulation of their knowledge through various learning opportunities and experiences.

## **Research Questions and Study Design**

This study, then, considers the complexity involved in examining the role of teachers within a schooling context that perpetuates a Black-White achievement gap and continues to degrade dialects, such as AAL. I begin my inquiry where all learning (should) start, with what is already known. This project employs an ethnographic approach to investigate what teachers know about linguistic diversity, particularly AAL. I began this project with the following research questions:

1. What knowledge do pre-service and in-service teachers have about linguistic diversity, particularly AAL?
2. Conceptions of language acquisition are a theoretical foundation for diversity in language. What knowledge do teachers have about this theoretical intersection and of language acquisition in general?
3. Further, what role does teacher knowledge about AAL, language acquisition, and linguistic diversity play in pedagogical decision-making (e.g., curriculum, instruction, selection of resources, interactions with students, etc.)?

After collection of data, however, and through the process of analysis, additional research questions developed from this study:

1. How is teacher knowledge conceptualized within educational and political settings?
2. What views of teacher knowledge undergird teachers in their practice?
3. What are considered viable sources contributing to a teacher's knowledge?

Examination of what teachers know about this topic can inform us of the ways some may conceptualize language diversity and, within in it, their layers of understanding. Probing

into the nature of cognitive development addresses efforts to develop teacher knowledge, in general, but especially regarding the topic of language diversity. My approach to investigating these research questions was framed through an interdisciplinary perspective of language, drawing from the fields of linguistics (Labov, 1969; Wolfram & Fasold, 1974), socio-linguistics (Hymes, 1972; Smitherman, 1977), and educational literacy research (Cazden, 2001; Dyson, 1997; Genishi & Dyson, 2009). I conducted a multi-case study consistent with the traditions in qualitative research. One chief tradition in this type of research is an emphasis on the interpretative, meaning-making process of data. The end goal of this research is not to evaluate, compare, or draw causal links between data. Thus I approach my cases with a lens that attempts to find out what they know, dig into their thinking processes, and make assertions based on my interpretation of how *they* have made sense of their worlds. My role in this project is not to romanticize, idealize, or evaluate these teachers. Instead, I aim to tell an analytic story that begins with my research questions and ends with conclusions I draw from data.

### **Organization of the Study**

The organization of this dissertation follows my inquiry into the questions mentioned above. Chapter two provides a more detailed backdrop of the literature framing the initial purpose of this study, the examination of teacher knowledge of AAL and its role in pedagogy. A discussion of how linguists and sociolinguists have defined and understood the dialect over the last fifty years juxtaposed to a master narrative about AAL provides context for the sociopolitical issues tied to the language. Also included are the ways AAL has been received in schools, particularly in literacy practices. This literature informs us of how and why the linguistic mismatch between teachers and

students is problematic in schooling. In this chapter, I also introduce a theoretical frame I am proposing in this project, which was developed through my data analysis and used as a conceptual tool throughout the study. This frame grows out of theoretical perspectives rooted in linguistics and socio-linguistics, along with ideas about pedagogy and cultural differences. This frame addresses the view of teacher knowledge from a thin, single-stranded lens and a traditional toolkit as central to pedagogy. I propose, instead, the view of teachers as embodied toolkits, who are the central actors that live out and enact classroom pedagogy. Within this frame, I also consider the teacher's multi-faceted life experiences as a construction of her accumulated knowledge, a term I will define. The theoretical construction of this frame, however, will be discussed in chapter five. Chapter three informs readers of my methodological approach, how the project was designed, and rationale for conducting a multi-case study. I also incorporate my own positionality, which was alluded to at the beginning of this chapter, but described in greater detail. In chapter four, I explain the genesis of embodied toolkit, through the data of my high school teacher case Sara. In my analysis of her knowledge, I document not only my interpretation of her knowledge, but also how those understandings led to the development of my view of teachers. Interwoven in this discussion is existing literature from which I draw and extend on for this new frame. In chapter five, I present my other two cases Raniya and Tiera and the ways I have interpreted their knowledge as a basis for who they are as embodied toolkits. Chapter six examines, case by case, how each teacher functions as an embodied toolkit within her classroom. I focus on their knowledge, as displayed in chapters four and five, and how it is personified and enacted into their curriculum, instruction, and relationship with students. Chapter seven considers the

implications of teacher knowledge about AAL in the classroom and how fostering such knowledge is integrally tied to viewing teachers as embodied toolkits. One of the implications of this project relates to professional development and teacher education. Therefore, included in this section is a discussion of the ways I perceive room for growth, for myself and for my cases, in our views of language. I also discuss what generalizable conclusions can be drawn from these cases.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature included in this chapter is only part of the ideas that framed this project. The theories and research detailed here served as an initial framing for and conceiving of this study. During the process of data analysis, however, I developed a new theoretical framing that served as the main conceptual tool for analysis of data. Included here is a brief synopsis of the conceptual tool I am proposing, but the contents in chapter four is devoted to grounding this approach through my data, as well as discussing other frames/literature from which it draws. This framing is a view of teachers as embodied toolkits, in which pedagogy is interpreted as a teacher's *lived* work. My approach pushes back on traditional notions of a toolkit, where a text or resource is emphasized as the "expert" source of pedagogy. It also dismantles teacher pedagogical knowledge as an appendage or "toolkit" of strategies with which the teacher periodically consults. Instead, this perspective draws on sociocultural views of cognitive development (Gonzalez & Moll, 2005; Miller & Goodnow, 1995; Rogoff, 1990) to consider ways of defining and acquiring knowledge, as well as what counts as knowledge. In particular, knowledge is a construction of one's experiences and is expressed in the way one lives out his/her life (Miller & Goodnow, 1995). Understanding teachers as embodied toolkits extends on this literature by conceiving of their knowledge as a construction of myriad life experiences, and pedagogy as a lived expression of such knowledge. This concept is further examined and divulged in chapter four. The remaining chapter discusses literature that helped frame the design and conception of this project.



Socio-linguistic theories (Hymes, 1972) framed initial research questions, and I employed an interdisciplinary perspective of language, drawing from the fields of linguistics, socio-linguistics, and literacy research. I begin with a historical overview of AAL, juxtaposing discussion between a master narrative about the dialect and its speakers, and research from the fields aforementioned. From the field of linguistics and sociolinguistics, I draw on the work of William Labov (1969), Geneva Smitherman (1977), Walt Wolfram (Wolfram & Fasold, 1974), Dell Hymes (1972), and John Baugh (Alim & Baugh, 2007). I then consider the ways AAL plays a role in schooling, particularly in literary contexts. Courtney Cazden (2001) and Sarah Michaels (2006) inform my understanding of various classroom literary practices through a sociolinguistic lens. In addition, Anne Dyson's (1997, 2005) work broadens notions of literacy to include ideas of student voice, play, and popular culture. The work cited in this chapter is intended to provide a theoretical backdrop for my project. An historical overview of AAL documents its marginalized status over time. Literature from the field of linguistics and sociolinguistics frames AAL as legitimate and highlights its social function in classrooms. Literacy research addressing practices involving AAL speaking students highlight the significance language variation plays in student learning and teacher instruction.

### **A Master Narrative**

In 1968, Labov was commissioned to investigate AAL speakers and to determine how the language played a role in their reading achievement. In the report on his findings, he wrote,

...the principle problem in reading failure is not dialect or grammatical differences but rather a cultural conflict between the vernacular culture and the schoolroom...But some of this conflict proceeds from the pluralistic ignorance which prevails in the classroom: the teacher does not know that the students' dialect is different from his own, and the students do not know just how the teacher's system differs from theirs. (Labov, 1969, p. 43)

Not only did Labov's findings affirm the dialect's linguistic legitimacy, implicit in what he writes is the reality of both teacher and student as dialect speakers. The problem is not one pertaining to linguistic difference, but of ignorance. The ignorance Labov wrote about in 1969 continues to shape a master narrative that exists about African American Language (AAL) today. This narrative constructs AAL as "slang," "bad English" (Jonsberg, 2001, p. 51), and spoken by lazy people (Godley, et al., 2006), which harkens back to research produced by educational psychologists Bereiter and Engelmann (1966). The master narrative has painted African American children as those coming from poor neighborhoods, impeded by verbal and cognitive development, linked to deficit views of language used with adults at home (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2006). Bereiter and Engelmann's ideas paralleled those articulated by Bernstein (1964) in his idea of restricted and elaborated codes; restricted languages were emblematic of cognitive deficiencies, whereas elaborated codes were emblematic of advanced critical cognitive development. Despite the existence of rigorous linguistic research produced by Labov (1969; 1993), Smitherman (1977), Baugh (1983), and Rickford (2000), to name a few, that demonstrated the "logic of nonstandard English" and its status as a legitimate language, this large body of research has yet to usurp the master narratives about AAL.

Some view features of AAL to be reflective of poor and working class African Americans. However, middle and upper class African Americans may also have access to and use the language to varying degrees; more research is needed on the speech of middle class African Americans.

These views of AAL, as portrayed by the master narrative, were evident in early childhood curriculum created by Bereiter and Engelmann (1968) for teachers working with AAL speaking African American children, whom they labeled “disadvantaged” (p. 6). In their curriculum, they described these students as, “enter[ing] school handicapped by the fact that the language they have learned to speak at home is different from the language used in school” (p. 5). Their understanding of language was couched in assumptions related, not only to race, but also class, as they compared children “from educated, articulate parents” with a child “who grows up in a social group that for generations has known only poverty and unskilled employment, where formal education is little known” (p. 5). The following were pedagogical understandings/suggestions they made for instructing AAL speaking students:

For such a child it is not merely the “He don’ts” and the dropped consonants, or even the limited vocabulary of his language that constitute his language handicap. By his inability to make full use of language as a tool in learning and thinking, he is prevented from taking full advantage of the opportunities for education and advancement that are at last being made available to him. Although this deficit in language mastery has its roots in social conditions that lie beyond the school, from the teacher’s point of view it is an educational deficit that can be treated like any other educational deficit. It can be removed, providing the teacher

understands clearly what it is she is trying to teach and providing she uses activities that for the needed learning. (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1968, p. 6)

The curriculum Bereiter and Engelmann proposed was undergirded by the following ideologies of language, role of a teacher, and the purposes of schooling: 1) a sociopolitical hierarchy within the English language, and what some call “standard English” (what I refer to as the Language of Wider Communication, LWC) as the dominant form of communication, 2) any linguistic deviation to LWC is symptomatic of cognitive deficiency and/or “handicap,” 3) deficit views of social groups outside the dominant culture that are consistent with the master narrative, 4) the role of a teacher is to strip linguistically diverse students of their language of origin, and 5) the purpose of schooling is to foster linguistic conformity and competence in LWC. The ideologies underlying Bereiter and Englemann’s curriculum are similar to a “White, middle-class” lens, which views those outside the “White” and “middle class” social groups as inferior and through a deficit perspective (Baratz & Baratz, 1970, p. 32). These views are inherently racist and are the basis for a variety of educational institutions that continue to devalue AAL speakers, which can be evident through teacher attitudes and beliefs about students speaking this dialect (Baratz & Baratz, 1970). Institutional racism is perpetuated through the use of institutional gatekeepers, such as official and unofficial curriculum, instructional practices, policies, etc. Bowie and Bond (1994) surveyed seventy-five pre-service teachers from a large university in an urban setting about their beliefs of AAL and AAL use in schools and found negative perceptions that did not acknowledge the dialect’s linguistic legitimacy. They also found a majority of the pre-service teachers did not feel the issue of AAL was well covered in the program and that schools were not

appropriate contexts for AAL usage. Teacher beliefs consistent with ideology espoused by Bereiter, Engelmann and Bernstein exacerbate the structural inequities of schooling, benefitting some and disadvantaging others.

### **AAL from a Linguistic/Sociolinguistic Perspective**

Ironically, the master narratives about AAL and its speakers are usually not rooted in linguistic knowledge or research. Linguists and sociolinguists, however, have responded to claims perpetuating a master narrative of AAL. Labov, for example, continued to write and research issues related to AAL, particularly as it related to schooling. In later work (Labov, 1993), he discussed the significance of the Ann Arbor Black English case for teachers and provided linguistic explanations of AAL, noting also how the differences in AAL and LWC might influence AAL speakers in learning to read LWC. Hymes is another example of a researcher who responded to contemporary views of AAL proffered at that time. He viewed language as inherently social and considered a variety of factors that made up this social component (e.g., ethnicity and race). This sociocultural approach on language was a response to the view that students from “disadvantaged” backgrounds were “linguistically deprived” (Hymes, 1972, p. xx). The approach required a broadening consideration of the groups to be included when examining the social aspect of language. Hymes advocated language instruction for students that would foster competence to communicate in varied contexts. He coined the phrase “communicative competence” to mean the linguistic knowledge and ability for a speaker to vary speech interactions based on appropriate audience, context, and culture. For students to possess classroom communicative competence, they would be knowledgeable and able to switch between the dialect spoken at home and the variation

of English required to be successful in schools. Sociocultural conceptions of language undergirded research regarding language use in classrooms and carried implications for pedagogical practices (Cazden, John, & Hymes, 1972). Early sociolinguistic work laid a foundation for educators and educational researchers considering students' linguistic backgrounds, especially the dialects or vernaculars of the social groups in which they belong.

In contrast to the Bereiter and Engelmann's view of AAL, who were trained in educational psychology (not linguistics), work by linguists Labov (1969) and Wolfram (Wolfram & Fasold, 1974) documented the linguistic features of AAL and legitimized the language as a dialect of English. Their work suggested that all people in America spoke a variation of English; some, however, like AAL, were stigmatized. Labov's (1969) seminal linguistic work confronted much of the federally funded research in the 1960s that sought to explain the achievement gap between African American children living in poor communities and their White counterparts. Labov's research directly refuted Bereiter and Engelmann's notions of African American children functioning from a deficit framework. Labov (1969) documented the linguistic legitimacy behind AAL (what he referred to as "black English" and "nonstandard English") and called for teachers to consider the language students speak in their reading instruction.

Adger, Wolfram, and Christian (2007) defined dialects of English as the ways in which the English language can vary in pronunciation, grammatical form, and vocabulary use. Wolfram and Ward (2006) detailed thirty-seven dialects of English, categorized into five geographical regions: The South, The North, The Midwest, The West, Islands, and also including sociocultural dialects. Examples of how regional/social dialects vary in

linguistic features are as follows: the word “car” can be pronounced more like “cah” if from a region in eastern Massachusetts; the words “pop” and “soda” are different vocabulary terms that carry the same meaning; “You did it,” means the same thing as “you done it,” in a different grammatical structure (Adger et al., 2007, p. 4).

One may wonder what exactly constitutes a linguistic dialect and how it differs from slang. While slang refers to an informal use of words or phrases (e.g. that’s cool; what’s up?), and thus a variation in vocabulary, a dialect refers to systematic differences in vocabulary, phonology, and grammar. For instance, White New Yorkers may pronounce “coffee” as “cawfee,” vary their consonant sounds to say “tree” as “three,” and even omit the “r” sound to pronounce “thirty-third” street as “toidy-toid” street (“New York Style,” 2005). Other White dialects exist in California as well. Due to variation in pronouncing some vowels, words like “hock” and “hawk” can sound the same, as well as “cot” and “caught” (“California English,” 2005). These are merely a few (of many) examples of how White Caucasians linguistically vary from LWC. Linguists that document such linguistic variations dismantle the notion that only people of color speak a dialect.

Other examples of dialects of English include Lumbee Vernacular English, in which the word “ellick” refers to a cup of coffee with sugar (Wolfram, 2006, p. 246). In different regions of the country, the term “sub” or “hoagie” refer to the same type of sandwich (Wolfram, Adger & Christian, 1999, p. 7). A phonological variation in the West Indies dialect pronounces the “th” sound like “d,” (e.g. “this” sounds like “dis”) and words ending in “-ing” have the “g” sound dropped (e.g. “looking” sounds like “lookin”) (Blake, 2006, p. 175). Examples of grammatical variations occur in the Bahamas, where

the present and past tense form of verbs is the same (e.g. “When he get money yesterday he buy a present”) (Wolfram, Childs, Reaser, & Torbert, 2006, p. 186). Dialects can have a sociopolitical connotation, but their significance is in the meaning being communicated.

As a rule-governed dialect, AAL carries unique linguistic and stylistic features, representative of the history of African Americans in this country. Smitherman (1977) defined AAL in this way:

Black Dialect is an Africanized form of English reflecting Black America’s linguistic-cultural African heritage and the conditions of servitude, oppression and life in America. Black Language is Euro-American speech with an Afro-American meaning, nuance, tone, and gesture. The Black Idiom is used by 80 to 90 percent of American blacks, at least some of the time. It has allowed blacks to create a culture of survival in an alien land, and as a by-product has served to enrich the language of all Americans (p. 2-3).

The nuance and tone Smitherman discussed above refer to the rhythmic, oral aspects of the dialect, as well as its underlying worldviews. Characteristic linguistic features of AAL include the use of the following words: *be* to signal repeated action, *been* to signal a recent action completed in the relative past, *done* to signal a recent action that had just been completed, not including the *-ed* ending to signal past tense; time is understood within the context of the conversation; using the same form of the verb regardless if the subject is singular or plural; the addition of the letter *-s* or apostrophe *-s* does not signify plural or possessive nouns; the position or numerical adjective describes these ideas; using double subjects; and using double negatives. While there are many features that



distinguish AAL from LWC, the number of differences has diminished over time as AAL speakers continue to be immersed in an LWC dominant society (Smitherman, 1977).

Linguist John Baugh (1983) discussed reasons why AAL is so strongly stigmatized. He explained that based on conceptions of language acquisition, a child's native language is the easiest for that child to speak. It does not require much effort, then, for native LWC speakers to speak their own dialect. LWC speakers are not required to learn other dialects, thus potentially making it difficult for them to empathize with non-LWC speakers. The lack of understanding, on behalf of many LWC speakers, is their potential basis for evaluating all other dialects on a sociopolitical hierarchical scale. Employing a view that interprets all dialects as equal in nature but varied in linguistic form, however, disposes the idea that some dialects cause cognitive deficiency. The persistent placement of LWC at the top of a sociopolitical scale requires other dialects speakers to choose between membership to the dominant culture and that of their own social group. Within an LWC dominant framework, becoming successful (socially, academically, financially, etc.) requires learning LWC, while maintaining another dialect as one's primary source of communication places you in a socially inferior status. The stigmatization Baugh discusses is based also on a system of racial oppression that negates nearly every aspect of African Americans and their cultures as negative, objects of derision, and irrelevant to the continuation of "White" culture. Additionally, many lack information about language or linguistics and, instead, depend on folk ideas, stereotypical perceptions, etc., to make judgments about the language and the people who speak it.

## **AAL and Literary Practices in Schooling**

Sociolinguistic and linguistic research has been instrumental in the field of education. Research around AAL, its linguistic legitimacy, and its link to culture all refute a fabricated hierarchy placing LWC above other dialects. Building the linguistic repertoire of all students empowers them to participate in a variety of avenues in society. When the dominant culture mirrors that of schools, the actions of institutional gatekeepers in the form of language discrimination can hinder learning. Institutions seeking to foster learning for all students need to consider how to dismantle barriers that perpetuate disconnects for linguistically diverse students.

Michaels (2006) incorporated Hymes and Labov's conceptions of language to frame her approach to language and literacy practices in classrooms. Situated in a first grade classroom, Michaels used "sharing time" as an example of a speech event that incorporated varied speech patterns for different students in the classroom (Michaels, 2006, p. 110). Her findings drew on a "cultural-difference position" and considered how varied speech patterns may influence academic literacy (Michaels, 2006, p. 111). Many of the White children used a topic-centered (explicit in nature, revolving around one topic) discourse style, while many of the Black children used a topic-associating (implicit in nature, which links together different events) discourse style. The teacher instructed students from a topic-centered approach, which aided the communication with her White students. Conversely, the teacher more often interrupted and corrected Black students using a topic-associating discourse during sharing. Michaels argued that teachers need professional development to foster awareness of the complexities in classroom discourse.

Cazden (2001) has also used discourse analysis to consider how language has been used in classrooms to privilege some and not others. As a teacher researcher, Cazden worked with Mehan to document the discourse patterns of “traditional” and “nontraditional” lessons (Cazden, 2001, p. 30). They documented traditional lessons as those in which the teacher initiated discussion, a student would respond to the teacher, and the teacher’s follow-up response to the student would be evaluative in nature. Cazden cited Mehan’s (1979) analysis in naming this type of discourse pattern as Initiation Response Evaluation (IRE) and found it characteristic in traditional lessons. In contrast, nontraditional lessons foster discussions more organic in nature and can provide more room for student voice and understanding in a classroom community. In her discourse analysis of a traditional geography lesson that she taught, Cazden highlighted the complexity of language usage, particularly how grammatical form and function do not always match. Cazden also pointed to sharing time as a literary practice that often follows the IRE discourse pattern, which can allow teachers to decide what constitutes appropriate narrative formats and topics. Teachers operating from a linguistically different culture than their students may interpret varied discourse styles through a deficit lens. Cazden, however, argued that both traditional and nontraditional lessons are necessary in schooling; it is up to teachers to choose the type of lesson most appropriate for a particular context.

Culturally diverse students may communicate with varied linguistic features, but culture also plays a role in communicative norms. Educational researcher Lisa Delpit (1988) discussed how language and culture could intermingle in teacher-to-student and also teacher-to-teacher interactions. She drew on Heath’s work to explain how directives

can be communicated in syntactically different ways. Delpit proposed that a culturally communicative way for many working-class African Americans is to express a directive in an explicit manner; this teacher could be considered “authoritative” vis-à-vis a “middle-class” way of conveying a command, with a teacher communicating a directive indirectly—through a question (Delpit, 1988, p. 289). She also discussed how, based on her work and experiences working with teachers, White administrators, researchers, and teachers often flexed their “culture of power” by only valuing their ideas of teaching Black children. Ideas that did not adhere to their own, even from Black teachers and their experiences, were silenced. Delpit (1988) recounted an example of this “silenced dialogue” (p. 282) when a Black teacher was culturally misinterpreted and accused of stifling student creativity. Another teacher in her building interpreted her skills-based, teacher-directed instructional approach as “authoritarian” (p. 288). This evaluation of the Black teacher was based on a “culture of power,” which mirrored the values of those dominant in that school building.

Dyson’s (1997) work investigated how literacy was enacted in the social worlds of culturally and linguistically diverse children. Her work featured literary practices that included varied textual elements—media-inspired popular culture, superheroes, and the “made up” worlds in child’s play. In her time observing Kristen’s second grade classroom, Dyson found boys writing X-men and ninjas into their writing time, often with stereotypical, racially and gendered norms. Children were also given an Author’s Theater platform, a real stage to perform their writing. This platform became grounds for negotiating social relationships, yielding power to the writers, and enacting an entire social world within the classroom. These worlds were not confined to the classroom, as

superhero stories were played out on the playground as well. Dyson's work points to the social, interactive process students' writing reflects. The "official" curriculum, however, inhibits the experiences and conceptions children bring from their own social groups.

The idea that writing is a reflection and expression of student identity and culture played out in Dyson's other work as well. In another study, Dyson (2005) studied the literary events of a particular community—writing practices in a first grade classroom, situated in an urban school district. Her focal student Tionna incorporated others' voices into her writing. In one incident, Tionna wrote a poem about her friend Elly and the feeling of melting in the sun like ice cream. This poem was based on Tionna's observation of Elly requesting that the student teacher pull down the window shade. In another incident, Tionna incorporated the voices of family members in her writing—her cousin who liked to copy her, for example. From a Bakhtinian view of language, Tionna responded to the voices in her life, re-appropriating their voices as she expressed her own. Dyson drew on Bakhtinian and sociocultural notions of language to illuminate the complex relationship between oral and written language, particularly for children speaking a dialect of English. In a traditional classroom that values one dialect over another, one might overlook Tionna's literary capacity. A deeper examination of her writing during literary events, however, revealed a reciprocal relationship between oral and written language that was intended for an audience. Dyson's work offers broadening perspectives of what we consider literacy in the "official" curriculum and also the significance of student voice in the ways it is enacted in the classroom.

Teachers' literacy practices can provide challenges for AAL speaking students in reading practices as well. Meier (2008) discussed how the difference in linguistic

features between AAL and LWC often result in teachers placing AAL speaking students in low-level reading groups, with a focus more on phonics than comprehension. She advocated for the simultaneous instruction of decoding and comprehension skills, since decoding skills are not a prerequisite for engaging in higher cognitive processes. Meijer suggested read alouds as an important platform for teaching comprehension, especially for students needing support with decoding. She recommended the multiple use of engaging texts, as repeated exposure can bolster vocabulary knowledge. Meijer also advocated for class discussion around texts to be more spontaneous in nature, as teacher-controlled turn-taking is not congruent to the home culture of many African American students and can inhibit participation. Similarly, research conducted decades ago by Goodman and Buck pointed to the barriers AAL speakers encounter in reading comprehension. In their work analyzing reading miscues from AAL speakers, they offered the following hypothesis:

The only special disadvantage which speakers of low-status dialects suffer in learning to read is one imposed by teachers and schools. Rejection of their dialects and educators' confusion of linguistic difference with linguistic deficiency interferes with the natural process by which reading is acquired and undermines the linguistic self-confidence of divergent speakers. Simply speaking, the disadvantage of the divergent speaker, Black or White, comes from linguistic discrimination. Instruction based on rejection of linguistic difference is the core of the problem. (Goodman & Buck, 1973, p. 6-7)

They also found that dialect-based phonological variations affected oral fluency. They suggested that reading curriculums did not make room marginalized dialect speakers, and

thus, could influence teachers to view dialectal differences as reading deficiencies. Their study concluded that while dialect speakers may make some oral miscues consistent with their native language, reading comprehension was not mitigated as a result of this linguistic variation from the text. They found that dialect speakers with high reading proficiency also made few dialect-based oral miscues; thus, oral fluency was a result and not a cause of high proficiency. They also argued that teacher rejection of varied dialects exacerbated dialect-based oral miscues.

This study is urgently significant today in a phonics-based literary context dominated by LWC. Drawing on my own experiences as an elementary teacher, AAL speaking students that are assessed as “below grade level” in fluency are monitored weekly through oral readings of LWC-based texts. As a test administrator, I have found many of students’ miscues were dialect-based, and as a result, the students scored lower on the assessments. These assessments were used to determine the types of reading groups to which they were assigned. Those that continued to score “below grade level” often received intense phonics instruction, a practice referenced by Meier (2008). High-stakes oral fluency assessments are another example of institutional racism, as noted by Goodman and Buck (1973), and are to the detriment of the literary lives of AAL speaking students. The intent of the aforementioned research was included to provide a historical context of AAL, its sociopolitical positioning, and the significance a teacher’s knowledge of the dialect has in student learning and instruction. The next chapter describes how the design of my project addresses a teacher’s knowledge about these issues.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODS**

Given the issues regarding achievement of African American students, the role of AAL in schooling, and teacher perceptions/attitudes toward AAL speakers, I considered how teacher knowledge about these issues may or may not impact what they do in their classrooms. Drawing upon Darling-Hammond (2000), Ladson-Billings (2000), and Weddington's (2010) work, I sought to examine the opportunities teachers have to be confronted with research about language and to grow their understanding of linguistic diversity for the students they serve. For teachers with knowledge about this topic, what role does such knowledge play in their pedagogical decision-making? It is this latter question that guided the design of my study.

#### **Rationale for Methodology**

The purpose of my inquiry is to better understand teacher knowledge, delve deeper into the worlds within a teacher's mind, and investigate motives, intentions and thoughts behind actions in a classroom. Numbers and statistics may be able to capture aspects of these topics, but they are inadequate in telling the story of issues more abstract in nature. I approach this project, then, with traditions of qualitative research. Specifically, I employ case study methodology. Citing Erickson, Dyson and Genishi (2005) describe the significance of a case in the following way:

It is the messy complexity of human experience that leads researchers to case studies in the qualitative or interpretive tradition. They identify a social unit, for example, a person, a group, a place or activity... That unit becomes a case of something, of some phenomenon." (p. 3)



Explained in this way, a case represents a social unit that becomes an instantiation of a larger phenomenon. The phenomenon of interest in this study is teacher knowledge about language diversity and its role in pedagogy. The social units to investigate this phenomenon are the teachers I have selected, as will be further described in this chapter. Each teacher is an instantiation of what teachers know about linguistic diversity, AAL, and the role of such knowledge in their practice. Stake (1995) calls attention to a characteristic feature of a case—its “boundedness” (p. 2). A case is differentiated from the larger phenomenon by the boundaries around a particular case. The teacher is the case; and, the case is also bound *by* the teacher in this study. Thus, other participants only become salient as they relate to the teacher.

For this project, I have chosen three cases, making this a multi-case study. Bogden and Biklen (1998) describe modified analytic induction as a way of conducting a multi-case study as follows:

Analytic induction is an approach to collecting and analyzing data as well as a way to develop and test a theory...The procedure of analytic induction is employed when some specific problem, question, or issue becomes the focus of research. Data are collected and analyzed to develop a descriptive model that encompasses all cases of the phenomena. The procedure has been used extensively in open-ended interviewing, but it can be used with participant observation and document analysis as well.” (Bogden & Biklen, 1998, p. 63)

This approach fits the nature of this study because it begins with an identified phenomenon, and the specific guiding question is as follows: What role does a teacher’s knowledge about linguistic diversity play in his/her decision-making about curriculum,

instructional practices, relationships/rapport with students, etc.? Another characteristic feature Bogden and Biklen (1998) identify in qualitative research is the central concern for meaning. Inherent in my phenomenon of interest is a concern for how teachers make meaning of the knowledge they acquire, and how teachers make sense of their knowledge about a particular topic within the confines of their classroom.

### **Role of Researcher**

During my eight years of teaching experience in a small, urban school district, I made an intellectual leap concerning conceptions of language that shifted my pedagogical stances and dispositions. As a classroom teacher for the majority of my doctoral program, interaction with both the research and researchers helped me frame the ideological questions and struggles I faced. The classroom became the setting where I “played” with and challenged the theories I learned from the university. It was the dance, and sometimes the sparring, between theory and practice that caused me to ask *real* questions and fostered my research interest and dissertation.

One question I have asked myself regarding my own positioning is: How does a Chinese-American teacher come to do a dissertation project relating to African American Language? I am neither African American, nor do I speak AAL, so issues of group membership position me as an “outsider,” and I have had mixed feelings. These feelings stem from an intimate understanding of being part of a minority group, and the disgust when someone “outside” the group “gets it wrong.” This is one of my biggest fears. In even broaching a topic remotely related to another group, I want to be very sensitive and proceed with the utmost caution. AAL is tied to the larger African American community, of which I am not a member. Because the language is marginalized in so many official

settings, I would argue there needs to be wider acceptance and advocacy for the language across racial lines. In this way, I aspire to stand as an ally from the Asian American community.

### **Case Selection Process**

Bowie and Bond (1994) discussed prevailing negative attitudes towards AAL and AAL speakers by both in-service and pre-service teachers. In light of the enormous task of shifting in-service teacher paradigms, their work, instead, focused on pre-service teacher beliefs and considered “one of the best ways to affect change for the future of education is through pre-service training” (Bowie & Bond, 1994, p. 113). Bowie and Bond’s work does not negate the exploration and education for in-service teachers, but does provide reason to consider pre-service teachers as a pertinent population to be included in this study. While my own experience shifting beliefs occurred as an in-service teacher, I am curious about how my beliefs may have been shaped had I had training as a pre-service teacher. If training about linguistic diversity needs to occur for both pre-service and in-service teachers, as Bowie and Bond suggest, I find it worthwhile to explore how members of both populations make sense of this topic.

**Surveys.** The three cases were selected through a process of surveys and interviews. Surveys were distributed to pre-service and in-service teachers at a large, Midwest university from December 2013-March 2014. The pre-service teachers who received surveys were selected based on the following criteria: 1) pre-service K-5 teachers (undergraduate or Master's students) who had previously completed the university’s required language course for elementary education majors, 2) those in their student teaching placement during collection of data (which occurred during the second

semester of their senior year at this university), and 3) those whose student teaching placements remained within the local area of the university. The in-service teachers who received surveys were selected based on the following criteria: 1) K-12 teachers who have completed at least one language course (which included dialects of English) in their undergraduate or Master's program, and 2) those who are/had been enrolled in the nearby university and who were currently teaching in a school local to the university. Professors from the nearby university provided names of teachers who met these criteria.

Surveys served a two-fold purpose: 1) to create a pool of potential participants from which to select cases, and 2) to garner information about teacher linguistic knowledge. Based on survey responses, nine pre-service and five in-service teachers were selected for initial interviews. Interviews focused on ascertaining knowledge teachers gained in coursework on linguistic diversity/language acquisition as well as teachers' perceptions of the role of such knowledge in their classrooms. Upon completion of interviews, the classrooms of one in-service early childhood teacher, one pre-service elementary teacher, and one in-service high school teacher were selected as separate cases.

Upon gaining consent from participating teachers, paper copies of surveys were distributed. Survey content included biographical information, educational background, encounters with diversity, and educational information related to language and literacy. For complete information solicited by survey, please see Appendices A-C. The image below, however, is the part of the survey that I focused on for selection of initial interviews.

Figure 1. Survey sample.

ENCOUNTERS WITH DIVERSITY	
For each item identified below, circle the number that best describes your experiences. (1 = none; 3 = some; 5 = extensive) <u>Then, circle "positive," "neutral," or "negative," to describe your varied encounters with diversity.</u>	
Encounters with diversity	Circle one
1a. I had encounters with racial/ class diversity in my early childhood grades (grades K-2).	1      2      3      4      5
1b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive    Neutral    Negative
2a. I had encounters with racial/class diversity in my elementary grades (grades 3-5).	1      2      3      4      5
2b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive    Neutral    Negative
3a. I had encounters with racial/class diversity in middle school (grades 6-8).	1      2      3      4      5
3b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive    Neutral    Negative
4a. I had encounters with racial/class diversity in high school (grades 9-12).	1      2      3      4      5
4b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive    Neutral    Negative
5a. I had encounters with racial/class diversity in my <u>post-secondary</u> education.	1      2      3      4      5
5b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive    Neutral    Negative
6a. I had encounters with racial/class diversity in my professional career.	1      2      3      4      5
6b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive    Neutral    Negative
7a. I have had or am currently having teaching experiences with diversity.	1      2      3      4      5
7b. I would characterize these experiences with diversity as:	Positive    Neutral    Negative

In particular, questions 5a and 7a were most relevant to the criteria for case selection; therefore, I used those two questions as a guide for those that were selected for initial interviews. Of the 47 pre-service surveys that were distributed, eight circled “5,” identifying themselves as having “extensive” exposure to racial/class diversity. For purposeful sampling, the three African American pre-service teachers were selected for initial interviews; two of them were included in the eight surveys that had circled “5” for questions 5a and 7a. Thus, one of the African American pre-service teachers was selected for purposeful sampling, resulting in nine total pre-service teachers who were selected for initial interviews. Purposeful sampling of African American pre-service teachers was not conducted with the assumption that those teachers were also AAL speakers. However, given the historical linkage to AAL and African Americans, purposeful sampling was employed. Of the 26 in-service teachers recommended by professors for survey distribution, seven surveys were returned and completed. Selection of initial interviews for in-service teachers was based on those who met selection criteria. Purposeful sampling of African American in-service teachers was also conducted for reasons stated above. Two of the five in-service teachers selected for the initial interviews met the purposeful sampling criteria. Additionally, in-service teachers who were also enrolled in the doctoral program at the university were considered outliers, and, thus, not selected for initial interviews.

**Initial interviews.** Nine pre-service and five in-service teachers were selected for initial interviews. Interviews were approximately 45-90 minutes in length. These semi-structured interviews were face-to-face, and I sought to better understand teacher knowledge of linguistic diversity by inquiring into completed coursework on language

and AAL, conceptions of language discussed/learned from coursework in language, and their views of the role of linguistic diversity (especially AAL) in classrooms. Initial interviews with pre-service teachers were conducted from January to February 2014. Initial interviews with in-service teachers were conducted during April 2014. Throughout the interviews, I used an excerpt of Wheeler and Swords' (2004) article, "Codeswitching: Tools of language and culture transform the dialectally diverse classroom," as a way to open conversation about teachers' thoughts regarding AAL in the classroom. The excerpt featured an interaction between an AAL speaker and his teacher correcting his language. From the fourteen pre-service and in-service teachers' interviews, three were selected as cases.

Selection of these cases was based on the researcher's judgment, and consideration was given to the varied types of knowledge teachers shared with me, which I categorized as experiential, pedagogical, and linguistic. The teachers that displayed the most knowledge in each of these categories, in the researcher's judgment, were selected as cases. Experiential knowledge was related to varied experiences with linguistic diversity and AAL, such as academic course work taken, family background, professional experiences, etc. Pedagogical knowledge related to ideas teachers had about the role of linguistic diversity and AAL in the classroom as well as to instructional ideas/practices related to this topic. Linguistic knowledge included understandings about syntactic and lexical variations in dialects, linguistic legitimacy of AAL, and language as tied to a larger historical and sociopolitical context. Teachers selected as cases varied in knowledge of language acquisition.

## Case Sites and Participants

My cases were two in-service teachers (Sara and Raniya) and one pre-service teacher (Tiera; all pseudonyms), who varied in current grade level and experience in teaching. The following section is organized by case, detailing information about each of the three teachers that were selected as participants (cases), as well the sites at which they were located, and other participants pertinent to each case.

**Sara.** Sara is a middle-aged, White Caucasian, female, high school teacher. She has taught high school English for 20 years. Her primary language of communication is LWC, but as she shared with me, she would incorporate the use of AAL at times during instruction. As will be evident in data transcriptions of her oral language (in chapter four through six), Sara displays syntactic variation in English, most often seen through her use of the word “gonna.” Her undergraduate degree focused on women’s studies, and she has two master’s degrees. One was part of a teacher certification program in curriculum and instruction. The other was related to bilingual methodology and was a Master’s in Teaching English as a Second Language (MTESL). She identified two courses in her MTESL program that played a significant role in her knowledge of language—a linguistics course focused on conversation and analysis and an education course focused on ESL and bilingual methodology.

Family background and personal relationships are relevant to data Sara provided regarding her knowledge of linguistic diversity; and, therefore, I include this information to contextualize this case. Sara is married to a Cantonese speaking Chinese man, and they have two biracial toddler children. While neither Sara nor her husband speak Mandarin Chinese, she is raising her children to speak this language. Also, Sara



mentions two professors that have played a role in her knowledge of linguistic diversity, whom I have named Dr. A and Dr. B. Both are education professors at the nearby university. Sara took the previously mentioned ESL/bilingual methods course with Dr. B, and also served as a graduate assistant for a research project under the direction of Dr. A and Dr. B, while she was completing her MTESL degree. Sara participated in a research project with Dr. A while she was still a teacher, and from that experience, developed a close friendship with Dr. A.

Another participant that played a role in understanding Sara and her knowledge of linguistic diversity was one of her students (Kiwane, a pseudonym), whom she called her “lead student.” He became relevant to the case, as Sara’s interactions with him and his class participation were what I interpreted as manifestations of her knowledge of language. Kiwane is an African American male, who flexibly incorporated both LWC and AAL into his oral language.

The high school at which Sara taught was within the vicinity of the nearby university. According to the school’s website, the racial/ethnic composition included: 36.7% Black, 8% Latino, 3.8% Asian/Pacific Islander, 7.8% multi-racial/ethnic, and 42.9% White. The school also reported 64.2% of students as low-SES. Sara taught three classes in the English department during the semester I observed her. The one class I observed was a “block” period, which meant that the class was two periods long, approximately one and a half hours in length. The class met from 8:13-9:55 a.m., with a four minute break in the middle of this “block.” The high school historically separated ESL students from freshman English classes. During the semester I observed, however, the school decided to include freshman ESL students with non-ESL students for English

classes, and the class I observed Sara teach was a pilot class for this initiative. This class had 22 students, eight were African Americans with varying proficiencies of LWC and AAL, seven were Latino and bilingual Spanish/English speaking, one Chinese American who was bilingual Mandarin Chinese/English speaking, one African who was bilingual French/English speaking, and five White Caucasian students with varying proficiencies of LWC. Among these students, there were also those receiving special education services as well.

**Raniya.** Raniya is a 37-year-old, African American female, early childhood teacher. She has taught early childhood aged children for 14 years within the same school district. Thirteen of those years were in the same school in which I observed her. During one of those years, she was teaching second grade in a different building. Her primary language of communication is LWC, but she informed me that she considers herself a “mixed” AAL speaker, as she flexibly uses features of AAL in varied contexts. Her undergraduate degree was in early childhood education, and she has an endorsement in teaching special education. She is currently working on completing a MTESL degree. Two courses she identified as key sources for linguistic diversity included an education linguistics course for teachers, and an education course about culture in the classroom.

One student who appeared in data throughout chapter six was Jayda (pseudonym), who was four years old at the time of observations. In total, Jayda spent four consecutive semesters in Raniya’s class, because the early childhood program serves students aged three to five and allows multi-year enrollment. During the semester I observed Raniya’s class, Jayda was in her second semester with Raniya. Jayda is an African American female, who flexibly used both LWC and AAL in her oral language.

The school at which Raniya taught was also within the vicinity of the nearby university and in the same school district as Sara's high school. The school contained classrooms that included instruction in Spanish; Raniya's was not one of them. Aside from variations of English, the languages spoken at her school included Arabic, Cambodian, French, Gujarati, Kanjobal, Lao, Lingala, Spanish, and Vietnamese. The racial demographics of the school were as follows: 42% African American, 13% biracial, 5% American Indian, 3% Latino, 2% Asian, and 32% White. 95% of students in her school qualify as low-SES. A screening process by the district was conducted to determine eligibility for enrollment. Criteria for students to enroll in the school included income, developmental delay (as determined by screening process, e.g., speech and language needs, academic, physical condition), family stresses, students in foster care, and/or other traumatic experiences. Her class had fourteen students; seven of them were African American, five were Latino, and two were White. Student ages ranged from three to five and were on a wide spectrum of language development and proficiency in LWC, AAL, and Spanish. Different students received varied services, including pull-out ESL instruction from the Spanish teacher. The speech pathologist also attended Raniya's class once a week to teach a lesson. Raniya taught two classes a day, with a morning session from 9:00-11:30 a.m. and an afternoon session from 1:00-3:30 p.m. I observed Raniya's afternoon session.

**Tiera.** At the time of data collection, Tiera was in the second semester of her senior year. During that semester, she was assigned a "gifted" second grade classroom to complete her student teaching experience. The "gifted" label was assigned by the district and provided for students who met certain scores for both the Naglieri Non-verbal Ability

Test (NNAT) and the Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT). Tiera's student teaching practicum was under the supervision of a cooperating teacher (Nancy, pseudonym) and a university instructor. While Tiera had experiences working with and teaching children (e.g., summer camp instructor), the student teaching experience was Tiera's first experience as a lead classroom teacher. The student teaching placement began in January and ended mid-May. During that time, Tiera shared instruction with Nancy, gradually taking more responsibility for teaching until "full takeover," a period of about six weeks in which Tiera was the primary teacher of the class. After the "full takeover" period, Tiera continued to teach partially throughout the day.

Tiera is an African American female and is bidialectal in LWC and AAL. Her class had 15 students, with eight Asian Americans (e.g., of Chinese, Indian, Filipino heritage), two African Americans, one Latino, and four Caucasians. Linguistically, almost all of the oral language I heard from students was some variation of LWC. However, two students received ESL instruction; one of them was the Latino student who spoke Spanish, and the other was one of the White students who spoke Russian. The school is located nearby the university, but is not within the same school district as Sara and Raniya. The racial demographics at Tiera's school were 36.9% Black, 31.1 % Latino, 12% Asian, 2.9% multi- or bi-racial, 0.6% American Indian, 0.2% Pacific Islander, and 16.4% White. About 85% qualified as low-SES, and approximately 32% of students in the school were ELLs.

Two of the students on whom Tiera focused (as will be further detailed in chapter six) were Brendon and Isaiah (pseudonyms), two African American male students, who flexibly used LWC and AAL in their oral language. Her relationship with the two boys

became relevant to Tiera's knowledge about linguistic diversity, as aspects of her teaching philosophy were enacted in her interactions with them (as we will see in chapter five and six).

### **Data Collection**

In the following section, I discuss the various types of data that were collected throughout this project. Included are details about my observations of each teacher in her classroom, follow-up interviews I conducted, other participants involved in the study, and further contextualizing data that were collected.

**Classroom observations.** Data for the three cases were collected between, March through November 2014. I observed Tiera in her classroom from March–May 2014, for a total of 23 observations. I observed about two to three times a week, for about one to two hours each visit. I observed Raniya in her classroom from April—June 2014, for a total of 18 observations. In Raniya's classroom, I also observed about two to four times a week, for about one to two hours each visit. I observed Sara in her classroom from September—November 2014, for a total of 17 observations. I visited Sara's classroom about one to three times a week, for about 60-80 minutes for each visit. For almost all visits, I wrote field notes of my observations and also audio-recorded the duration of the visit. Still images and video recordings were taken to document artifacts related to teachers' instruction and student work.

**Follow-up interviews.** Dyson and Genishi (2005) describe interviews ranging from informal to more formal in nature, and the purpose of interviews being to “deepen an understanding of what we observe in the classroom and sometimes help to interpret observed activities from participants' perspectives (p. 76). The purpose of my follow-up

interviews, therefore, was to foster ongoing dialogue with my teachers and further investigate their understandings of language as they enacted their knowledge into practice.

Follow-up interviews were conducted throughout my observational time of each case. Most follow-up interviews were casual in nature, during a break in the schedule (e.g., lunch, recess, plan time, or after school) and served as a way to ask questions I had about instruction or to share insights about my observations. I conducted one to two more formal follow-up interviews, in which we talked over a meal. Those interviews were semi-structured, as I had prepared guiding questions for the interviews, but they functioned more as conversations since I responded and inquired into information they provided. Follow-up interviews were audio-recorded, and most were written up into field notes. The only follow-up interview conducted outside the collection period (but still IRB covered) was with Sara, during June 2014. My collection period had ended somewhat abruptly, as Sara experienced family issues towards the end of my observations with her; and, based on my judgment, I decided to stop collecting data in Sara's classroom. However, there were follow-up questions that were left unanswered until June 2014, when I conducted a follow-up interview at that time.

**Other participants.** While the focus of my observations was on the teacher and her instruction, other students were naturally involved in the process. In the previous section, I have already mentioned which students became salient in each case. In Tiera and Raniya's cases, I developed enough rapport with students for them to interact with me in their natural environments. Therefore, in those cases, I pulled out individual students toward the end of my observational time, and conducted informal interviews with several students. I selected students to interview if their interactions (e.g., class

work, social interactions, participation in the lesson) were related to some observation I had made of the teacher. I had anticipated these student interviews and included student assent/consent forms as part of my original study design.

**Contextual data.** Other data collected to contextualize pre-service teacher linguistic knowledge were observations of a required language course for elementary education majors at the university. I observed this course periodically between August and October 2014, a total of seven times. Each observation was approximately 2.5 hours long. Observations of this course helped me better understand conceptions, readings, types of discussions in which pre-service teachers who completed this course might have engaged. During the data collection period for this course, I conducted one semi-structured group interview. The group interview was held during the regular class time, but on a week in which the instructor was at a conference and class had been canceled. I held the interview in the same classroom in which the course met, and several students showed up to talk about conceptions from the course. The group interview was audio-recorded.

### **Data Analysis**

Dyson discusses how the “holistic experience” of data collection—gaining access and becoming part of your observational setting— can become “fragmented” in field notes, transcriptions, and artifacts, which are mere snapshots of the setting (Dyson, 1997, p. 26). Data analysis, however, is a process where “coherence” can be “restored” as data are organized and linked in ways that can still capture “the messiness of human experience” (Dyson, 1997, p. 26). My aim, throughout the analysis of data, was to organize, interpret, and make sense of the fragments of data I had collected into a

coherent, analytic narrative of my teachers. I accomplished this through a process of open/selective coding and thematic analysis.

Bogden and Biklen (1998) describe coding as a way of categorizing data in order to more systematically organize the findings. As previously mentioned, my observational data took the form of field notes and also transcriptions of key events. Open coding was a process of taking note of various themes, patterns, and ideas as I re-read my field notes, line by line. These notes served as a way for me to organize recurring events in categories. I found that outlining these categories on my computer with data samples listed under each category helped move me toward more selective coding by collapsing categories into larger themes. Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw describe coding as “a word or short phrase that captures and signals what is going on in a piece of data in a way that links it to some more general analytic issue” (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 146). In this way, my themes were codes that captured aspects of my data and were analytically useful in telling the larger story.

It is important to note that I used various symbols throughout transcribed data. Ellipses were representative of a lapse in time during the interview (e.g., if the teacher or I said something I found irrelevant, an interruption) or words that distracted from overall meaning (e.g., “um,” “like,” “you know”). Parentheses in transcriptions symbolized words or comments I inserted. Brackets were used to replace a word the speaker had said (generally an identifying name). In Tiera’s case, I have transcribed data in which students used her last name to call her Ms. \_\_\_\_\_. In these cases, I transcribed them as Ms. Tiera. It should also be noted that teachers generally used the term “AAVE” (African American Vernacular English) when referring to AAL. This is, in part, based on



previous learning about the language, but also perhaps due to my usage of “AAVE” during interviews as well. At the time of collection, I had not yet decided how I would refer to the language.

For each case, I employed the process of open/selective coding and thematic analysis, first in the teacher’s initial interview data, and then in observational data from the classroom. The purpose of ordering analysis in this way was to first consider what themes of “knowledge” I found from information they provided me. Then, as I coded classroom observational data, I considered how the themes identified from initial interviews could connect with observational data. The process of linking data and themes in order to make assertions about each case was difficult. To construct larger themes and assertions across all three cases was even more difficult. I document this process in detail in chapter four. This process, however, was significant for the reason Emerson et al. named (I have italicized font to stress my point):

Qualitative coding is a way of opening up avenues of inquiry: the researcher identifies and develops concepts and analytic insights through close examination of and reflection on fieldnote data. Such coding is not fundamentally directed at putting labels on bits and pieces of data so that what “goes together” can be collected in a single category; the ethnographer is indeed interested in categories, but less as a way to sort data than as a way *to name, distinguish, and identify the conceptual import and significance of particular observations*. (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 151)

The process of considering the importance of particular observations propelled my analysis towards developing the theoretical frame I propose in this project. As will be

described in chapter five, my observation of Sara's repeated mention of friendship and family in her life made me question the significance of such relationships in her knowledge construction. This question then led me to ask more questions, such as: How am I defining "knowledge" and how is knowledge acquired? These questions, however, eventually led me to consider new ways of making sense of my data. The next chapter is devoted to documenting this process.

## CHAPTER 4

### TEACHERS AS EMBODIED TOOLKITS

A main question guiding this project revolved around what teachers know about linguistic diversity, particularly African American Language. In my journey to tease out what knowledge my cases had about this topic, and the meaning of such knowledge in their lives as teachers, I found that experiences did not fit “neatly” within categories. They, in fact, intersected, enhanced, and meshed into one another. Still, after loosely categorizing them, I questioned what experiences “counted” as sources for “real” knowledge. Particularly, what role do personal experiences play in knowledge construction? Attempts to trace the manifestation of their knowledge in the classroom were not as linear a process as I had anticipated either. It was in this process, however, that I began to consider not just *what* teachers know, but *what counts* as knowledge, and *how* they come to know at all.

In previous chapters, I have discussed traditional usage of the term “toolkit,” and my proposal of a new conceptual tool that conceives of *the teacher* as the toolkit, an embodied toolkit. This view of teachers situates the teacher, not curriculum, resources, etc., at the center of instruction. Instructional resources, however helpful they may be, are incapable of accomplishing anything without the teacher. It is the teacher who must make sense of and interpret what she reads within what she already knows. Her knowledge, though, is comprised of more than what she has read, coursework she has taken, and workshops she has attended. Her knowledge is a construction of the experiences that have qualitatively shaped her as a person, and it is those experiences

through which a teacher enacts her knowledge. A teacher's experiences, then, are a foundation and starting point for her learning and for understanding her knowledge.

In this chapter, I trace the genesis of this notion, grounded in my data, and as a development during the analysis process. In order to do this, I have selected data from one of my cases—high school English teacher Sara—to illustrate this process. For organizational purposes alone, I discuss the other two cases in the next chapter, further demonstrating each teacher as a unique, embodied toolkit. My selection of this case to use for the purposes of this chapter was purely logistical. I began my analysis process with Sara's case because data collection for her was shorter than the other cases, for personal reasons related to her family. Given the time period with which I had to write this dissertation, I decided to start data analysis with Sara, to provide myself time if further follow-up data needed to be collected from her. It was in this first case, though, as I will show, that initial ideas about an embodied toolkit took form. Through analyzing the other two cases, I was able to better articulate and build this frame. Returning to the literature helped me construct theoretically how I was making sense of this data.

This chapter is structured by first grounding the idea of the teacher as an embodiment of the toolkit in my data, and then incorporating the literature I turned to for its theoretical construction. Rogoff (1990) and Miller and Goodnow's (1995) understandings about cognition through a sociocultural lens informed my inquiry into how teachers come to know. That is, the way we live and how we know is inextricably tied to who we are and our experiences. Teachers enact who they are and what they know in the classroom; what they know is a conglomeration of their life experiences. They, in effect, enact their life experiences. The first section of this chapter lays the

groundwork for this idea by showing how the meshing of Sara's varied life experiences form her accumulated knowledge, who she is as a teacher. In chapter six, I extend on this by demonstrating how she enacts that knowledge in her classroom. The second section further develops the meshing of Sara's life experiences by introducing the role of her personal experiences in knowledge construction. It is at this juncture that I draw on Gonzalez and Moll's (2005) theoretical frame, funds of knowledge, to consider what "counts" when referring to teacher knowledge. Responding to deficit views that only considered students within a single "thin" context of the classroom, Gonzalez and Moll approached student knowledge from multiple "thick" representations of their lives. By acknowledging the experiences of students' homes and communities, knowledge is redefined to encompass and validate the whole person, not limited to one angle. Embodied toolkit builds on their frame by focusing on the *enactment* of such knowledge, when a variety of experiences, especially personal ones, are considered. The frame I propose acknowledges and honors the myriad experiences teachers have, and uses that as a starting point when examining how those experiences manifest in the classroom. In the third section, I discuss a distinguishing element I found in Sara, which were her understandings about various aspects of language. I highlight her knowledge about this topic as a way of pushing back on current sociopolitical implications of teacher knowledge. I apply the work of Apple (1988, 2000) to explain the deskilling of teachers through politicized, mandated textbook use.

### **Accumulated Knowledge and Its Role in Learning**

In the process of organizing experiences into "clean cut" categories, I realized that an experience could not be defined by one label. Still, my loose categorization into

personal, academic, and professional was a way I organized data to make a point—that our life experiences are not compartmentalized. In this section, by labeling an experience as “personal,” and showing the multiple intersections of that event with others, illustrates how its label is not befitting at all. Decisions about graduate school, where to work, who to marry, do not fall under one category, as these life decisions often intersect, overlap, and mesh into each other. I, therefore, use the term “accumulated knowledge” to acknowledge the variety of multi-faceted experiences over one’s lifetime. The samples of teachers’ accumulated knowledge I share in this project are just that—samples. The data samples I provide come from initial interviews with teachers (as stated in chapter three), an event unable to capture the totality of their knowledge/experiences. Therefore, what I describe as accumulated knowledge is not a comprehensive description of the teachers. To many, academic and professional experiences naturally lend themselves as contributors of knowledge. However, I also want to highlight the role personal experiences have in shaping a teacher. These multi-stranded experiences help us understand the embodied toolkits teachers are.

**Meshing of Sara’s experiences.** During Sara’s teaching career, she participated as a teacher in a research project that connected her with a professor (Dr. A) with whom she developed a close friendship. Shortly after, Sara married a Cantonese speaking Chinese man, originally from Hong Kong. After living in Hong Kong with her husband for a semester, she enrolled in the MTESL program when she returned to the U.S. During that program, she served as a graduate assistant for Dr. A and Dr. B, working on a new research project. The events described here were avenues in her life that intersected and also dynamically influenced the others. Learning about language, culture, and

teaching a linguistically diverse population occurred in various avenues of Sara's life. Her MTESL program led to opportunities to develop her craft as a teacher of bilingual students. During this time, she also worked as a graduate assistant on a research project, and as such, engaged in extensive reading and dialogue about AAL. Family ties and personal friendships, too, played important roles in fostering new interest and understandings about AAL, language, and culture. In this section, I attempt to map out these intersections and show their dynamic interplay.

One course Sara took during the MTESL program was on ESL and bilingual methodology. When I asked her what she remembered about the course and its objectives, Sara recalled course content and revealed her in-depth knowledge about how to teach linguistically diverse students. Below we see how the content of this course also addressed her role as a teacher. I name the professor of the course Dr. B, since she will appear in other interview excerpts and intersect with those experiences.

Sara: I *think*, what she [Dr. B] was trying to get at ... think about [pause] the differences between ... sheltering instruction for English Language Learners, a true bilingual program, and ... through those two avenues, how do we help language learners acquire academic English. Or, academic language period. Or even if students are using their first language to acquire knowledge of math or social studies. So it was all kinda talking about those distinctions across K-12 ... because she knew I was a high school person, she *very* much kinda was able to ... differentiate for me and for everybody in the class. She was very aware of our contexts, potential contexts. So we did a lot of lesson plans, like I worked with a native Spanish speaker who I was also close with and we did a lot of ... lesson

plans together where Spanish was, ... the *use* of native language was really prominent. And then we also worked on lesson plans that typically used sheltering techniques.

Alice: I'm not familiar with sheltering techniques. What does that mean?

Sara: ... a series of techniques that an ESL teacher can use... maybe strategies of vocabulary where students are using their home language and English. Or, ... using realia, you know, just *stuff*, ... scaffolding academic vocabulary, ... using visuals ... it's very similar to the SIOP, ... those sort of multimodal techniques, ... but using those in content areas as well.

In this excerpt, Sara not only recalls what she remembers as the big ideas in the course, but also reveals her specific knowledge about bilingual methods, namely varied sheltering techniques. We also see an intersection between academic course content and professional development in lesson planning, as the professor was mindful of practical classroom application.

The meshing of Sara's academic and professional experiences continued while in the MTESL program. At that time, she also served as a graduate assistant for a research project on language diversity, which provided opportunity to learn more about dialects. Sara stated that one of her roles as a graduate assistant was reading and gathering articles related to AAL, which were to be used in a university language diversity course. Prior to this excerpt in the interview, Sara had detailed the MTESL program as "the most coursework" covering "language diversity." Below, she names the various sources in which she learned about dialects. We see Dr. B appear, again, this time shifting into a



new role in Sara's life. Dr. A also takes on a role that overlaps her academic and professional lives.

Alice: So from those classes ... were there any that ... covered or touched upon ... dialects or dialects of English?

Sara: I think ... English dialects came in ... different ways ... it came in through Dr. B's class ... ESL and bilingual methodology... it also came ... through courses in ... socio- sociocultural expectations. It came in a little bit ... through the [MTESL] program. And then I would also say that through, ... even though I didn't take courses from Dr. A, ... we did a research project on critical reading and critical writing in the classroom, and just in our conversations, dialect came up, and language diversity came up in that research. And then I also was her [Dr. A's] TA and Dr. B's TA, and they were doing research at [various local elementary schools]. So *many* conversations around language diversity at that time, including dialects. Of course I would say my best teachers have been my students.

While my question for Sara attempts to elicit information about dialects covered in her coursework, her response blends her academic coursework, her professional experience as a teacher participating in a critical literacy project, and then her professional experience as a TA as well. Her relationship with Dr. B transitions from her academic life, as her student, to her professional life, when Sara becomes her "TA." Dr. A, also, moves from being a professor she collaborated with as a teacher, to then becoming her supervisor in Sara's role as a graduate assistant. Later, in this section, I show how Dr. A's professional relationship changes to be a significant friendship for Sara. Another

noteworthy observation about Sara's response is her emphasis on the conversations these relationships facilitated. The relationships alone were not contributors to Sara's knowledge of dialects; it was the social interactions she experienced within those relationships that grew her understanding.

In the above excerpt, Sara mentions her students being her "best teachers" of language diversity. I further inquired into this comment.

Alice: ...Why would you say that (her "best teachers" of language were her students)?

Sara: ... students have taught me through their own work and their own talk ... that they are constantly languaging, constantly, ... code-switching, ... I hear it all the time, I see it in their writing, and I understand kind of what they're doing and for what purposes and why.

Here we see Sara connecting what she has learned across experiences—from her academic coursework to her job as a graduate assistant, and now to her role as a teacher. The above interview excerpts show intersections in her academic and professional experiences.

**Sociocultural views of cognitive development.** From the interview excerpts above, we see how each experience Sara named flowed throughout her various roles as teacher, graduate student, and graduate assistant. The interconnectedness between Sara and her varied life experiences is consistent with the work of Rogoff (1990) and Miller and Goodnow (1995). Rogoff builds on Vygotskyian and Piagetian notions of the individual and social world by considering these two entities as "inseparable" and "mutually embedded" (p. 27). The "whole picture" is not gained by examining the "sum

of the parts,” but rather, “the whole has an essential character and process that must be studied for itself” (p. 28). Rogoff (1990) proposes knowledge to be acquired in the following way:

Cognitive development occurs in socioculturally organized activities in which children are active in learning and in managing their social partners, and their partners are active in structuring situations that provide children with access to observe and participate in culturally valued skills and perspectives. (p. 37)

Explained in this way, learning is a process interwoven into the social and cultural fabric of our lives. Miller and Goodnow (1995) interpret the mutuality of the individual and sociocultural context through a cultural practices approach, in which “practice are actions that are repeated, shared with others in a social group, and invested with normative expectations and with meanings or significances that go beyond the immediate goals of the action” (p. 7). This “holistic” approach views a person and her context moving in reciprocally dynamic ways. An individual influences her surroundings because contexts are “not as static givens, dictated by the social and physical environment, but as ongoing accomplishments negotiated by participants” (Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p. 8).

Conversely, one’s context also constructs who that person is. The coalescence of the two:

break[s] down the segregation of thinking from other parts of life—the separation of thinking from what we call ‘doing’ or ‘being,’ the division between ‘cognitive’ development, on the one hand, and ‘social,’ ‘emotional,’ or ‘personal’ development on the other. In contrast to this separation, the concept of *practice*

recognizes that the acquisition of knowledge or skill is part of the construction of an identity or a person. (Miller & Goodnow, 1995, p. 9)

The sociocultural view of cognitive development, based on Rogoff and Miller and Goodnow's work, contributes to the notion of the teacher as an embodied toolkit. From this frame, teacher knowledge can only be understood as a construction of the experiences within the sociocultural world from which they come and cannot be separated from who that teacher is. And who is a teacher in the classroom? Cazden (2001) describes schooling as a "performance," in which the teacher plays the roles of "director" and "principal player," and the students as "novices...essential to the enactment of a culturally defined activity" (p. 105). In this way, a teacher performs practices that are an expression of who they are. Rogoff (1995) illustrates how an individual and her experiences cannot be separated when telling a story: "When people narrate remembered experiences from their own lives, they are expressing who they are" (p. 9). As embodied toolkits, a teacher's performance through varied practices is an enactment of the myriad experiences throughout her life. These experiences not only represent her sociocultural world, but are also the access points by which she comes to know. What sorts of experiences, then, are acknowledged and valued for the teacher in a classroom?

### **What Counts as Knowledge?**

**Role of personal experiences.** Sara's personal experiences played a role and meshed with her professional ones, and vice versa. During our initial interview, I was curious about what piqued her interest in language, given the depth of her linguistic knowledge. The following four interview excerpts are placed in chronological order,

within the same interval of the interview, in response to my inquiry into the significant events contributing to her language journey. In each excerpt, I show the intermixing of her personal and professional life. Sara is a White, European American married to a Cantonese Chinese man. In this first excerpt, Sara identifies her family as a reason towards her interest in language.

Alice: I'm fascinated with how much you know about ... language ...

Sara: [laughs]

Alice: ... is that something that you've kind of been prone to being interested in? Or, ... do you have life experiences that have kind of made you, ... piqued your interest more in that, or, ... even how you decided to go into the MTESL program?

Sara: ... I think, ... certainly having ... a bicultural, biracial marriage and family ... I spent a semester in Hong Kong when my husband was on sabbatical, and just seeing how ... language, the facility of language that people have. I took a trip to Singapore and the cab driver spoke five languages. And we're like, we're like arguing about two languages. So I think all of that opened up, [pause] like, huh [in question tone], there might be this whole world that as an American, I didn't, I didn't really, I wasn't really exposed to and maybe I wanted to be...I guess it's about, it's about possibility...when you use another language or you're in another culture, ... there's a whole other part of who you are...I guess I find that fascinating and I wouldn't want students to have to, and they often do, cut off whole parts of who they are, through their schooling."

Her marriage to a Cantonese husband allowed her to live in another country for a period of time, providing new exposure to other languages, cultures, and ways of living. This personal experience, however, did not stay in another country or as a past memory. Sara drew on it to link her new understandings to students and schooling. She verbalized how language and culture comprise a part of a student's identity, "a whole other part of who you are," and considered the ways students have to negotiate or "cut off" this identity within schools. In this way, this personal strand of knowledge meshed with and influenced her professional life.

As a continuation of the conversation above, I listed various life experiences (e.g., marriage, coursework, etc.) that she had highlighted throughout the interview, in an attempt to better understand how those experiences fit together. While proposing a timeline of events, she made sure to include the personal impact Dr. A, from the previous section, had when they participated in a research project together. Dr. A's family is biracial and multilingual family—she and her husband are a biracial couple and speak several languages between the two of them. Dr. A raised her biracial children to be bilingual. In this next excerpt, we see how Sara's professional experiences also played a role in her personal life.

Sara: Well, I think from early on, 'cause before we did this research project, I did another research project with Dr. A, and it wasn't specifically around language, but just being around her family, ... she and her husband consciously developed a multicultural, multi-, bilingual, biliterate family ... I just kinda thought that was cool. [laughs] ... And ... realized that wow ... what an asset, all of that is.

Within the context of the interview, which began when I asked about what piqued her interest in language, we see that Sara's deliberate mention of this relationship played a role in her language journey. When Sara said that she "realized that wow" and "what an asset, all of that is," she shows how exposure to this professor's family provided a new, positive insight about being part of a multilingual family. Her personal affect is also involved when she says, "I just kinda thought that was cool"; we see that Sara has positive sentiments and personal value towards a linguistically diverse family. During the interview, Sara had also informed me that she was raising her children to be bilingual in Mandarin Chinese. Sara and her husband hired a Mandarin-speaking tutor who came to their house and taught their children the language. When I had expressed similar interest in raising my daughter to be bilingual in Mandarin as well, Sara informed me of a local school district that was in the process of developing a bilingual Mandarin elementary school program. She even encouraged me to consider moving within the vicinity of this school district in order to enroll my daughter in this program. We see, then, that her positive sentiments about a linguistically diverse family were put into action, not only in her own life, but in the encouragement of mine as well. In this way, Sara shows how a professional relationship, which started with a research project, meshed into a personal friendship, as she became acquainted and spent time with this professor's family.

Sara confirms the evolution of their relationship, from professional to personal, in this next excerpt. As I continue the interview, I try to piece together a chronological order of significant events in her language journey. I realize that Sara has mentioned this professor's name throughout the interview, and I stop to ask how they became friends.

Alice: How did you guys become friends?

Sara: ... we became friends through ... a research project, and it was on critical literacy. So it was a cohort of professors, teachers ... through that collaboration, ... Dr. A and I became pretty tight.

Sara's description of their relationship as "pretty tight," as well as the repeated mention of this professor's name, signaled to me that their relationship was significant to Sara. I wanted to know, however, what sort of role this professor actually played in her language journey. I attempted to ascertain this information by retelling Sara her own story, framing her personal relationship as a significant event. I began by recapping for her significant events and dates she had identified—becoming friends with this professor in 2002/2003, getting married in 2004, living in Hong Kong in spring 2005, beginning the MTESL program in Fall 2005, and then serving as a graduate assistant for a research project on language diversity towards the end of her MTESL program. In Sara's response, we see the significant role this professor plays, not only in her language journey, but also in her personal life decisions.

Alice: Wow, that is so interesting

Sara: ... I never put all this together until right now [laughs]

Alice: [laughs] ... so it really has kind of been this journey of, it sounds like, becoming friends with someone that's bilingual [upward tone like a question] and part of, a bilingual, ah—

Sara: Mm-hmm [in agreement]

Alice: ah [pause] family, and that, so something about that seemed attractive to you—



Sara: Yes

Alice: and, um, and then, were you already dating, um, someone who was...

[voice trails off], and if these questions are too personal [laughing while talking]...

Sara: ...[laughing]

Alice: [laughing while talking] sorry, I feel like I'm prying. It's like, [in high-pitched, mimicking voice] tell me the whole story of how you got married [chuckling]

Sara: [laughing]...if you want to know the truth, Dr. A ... was like, 'cause we were, okay this is not research-based—

Alice: [smiling, laughing] no, it's okay! We're just chatting.

Sara: But Dr. A, you know, encouraged, okay—

Alice: like introduced?—

Sara: tick tock. No, she didn't introduce, but she's like "tick tock"

Alice: [loud laughing]

Sara: [laughing] We were that close of friends ... and it's probably a good thing because, in fact, tick tock

Alice: ... but were you and, ... your husband now, were you guys already dating then?

Sara: Yes, we were already dating

Alice: So she was saying "tick tock"—like you guys should get married—

Sara: Yes [laughing]

Alice: move along—

Sara: Yes

In this dialogue, Sara does, indeed, affirm this professor's role in her language journey when I frame it as one that includes, "becoming friends with someone that's bilingual," and "part of a bilingual family." As the conversation proceeds, while not "research based," as Sara said, she reveals how "close of friends" she and this professor were—so much so that this professor played a role to "move along" her dating relationship towards marriage.

This professor, Dr. A, who Sara considered a close friend, also played a role in her understanding of AAL-speaking students. At one point in the interview, I asked Sara if she remembered any other big ideas from her ESL/bilingual methods course. Below, she shares something she remembers Dr. A telling her about AAL-speaking students.

Sara: ... I'm trying to remember if the dialect was an explicit part of [Dr. B's] class or if it was part of what we were doing with the research team at the time because the research team was also working on ... the [department's] courses, and making sure there was a pretty large component of instructing language diversity. And so at some point though I recall [pause], and I'm not sure if it was a course or [...the work as a TA], it all comes together, but we *really* talked quite a bit about, um, dialect and read about, specifically AAVE, and talked through quite a bit of that ... I always remember [Dr. A] saying something like 'How are you going to tell a kid that the language his mother talks to him in, or that he dreams in, is wrong?' ... so coming back into the classroom, working with students ... I try mightily to honor their, *whatever* their dialect they're electing to use in the

classroom or whatever set of language skills they're electing to use in the classroom.

Sara repeats what Dr. A's statement to her in a follow-up e-mail interview after our initial interview. In this e-mail, I ask, "What role do you see AAVE having in the classroom and/or in the curriculum?" Sara discusses student language interests, as well as a unit she collaborated on with another teacher. She then writes:

Furthermore, I am always reminded of what [Dr. A] once asked me about AAVE. How can you tell a child that the language he/she dreams in, the language his/her mama uses with him or her is wrong?

It is interesting that something Sara "always remember[s]" comes from Dr. A, a significant and personal relationship to her. It is also important to note that *what* she remembers is framed within a family context, which is related to the first reason Sara identified as her own interest in language. Her word choice, "I am always reminded of..." and her repetition in making this statement reveals the personal significance of this message. We see here a connection across this personal relationship to her professional life. After stating what she holds onto Dr. A saying to her, Sara immediately talks about "coming back into the classroom, working with students." She transfers this understanding about language towards her attitude for her students by "mightily honor[ing]" the "dialect" or "whatever set of language skills they're electing to use." A final point to be made about this excerpt is about how Sara views her learning about AAL. She meshes the learning from her academic and professional experiences when she says that, "it all comes together." Her learning in these experiences is also couched within many conversations about the dialect.

**Drawing on funds of knowledge.** Clearly, Sara's personal experiences played an important role in who she was as a teacher. Seldom, though, are those types of events given any merit in official spaces. Among those that have are Gonzalez and Moll (2005), who documented the work of an interdisciplinary cadre of researchers and teachers investigating what knowledge Latino students brought from their homes into schools. Their methods and approach were a response to historical definitions of culture, bound by clear traits and categories. Like Miller and Goodnow, they interpreted people from "Processual approaches [that] focus on the process of everyday life, in the form of daily activities, as a frame of reference. These daily activities are a manifestation of particular historically accumulated funds of knowledge that households possess" (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 41).

Funds of knowledge departs from traditional ways of viewing student knowledge from a single, "thin," perspective, bound within the classroom walls. This frame, instead, validates multiple, "thick" sources, from which students come to know—namely, their homes. The valuation of household knowledge traverses into a child's personal experiences, considers who she is as an individual, and does not essentialize her into a pre-labeled group. I juxtapose what is proposed in funds of knowledge for students to the way teacher knowledge is constructed, as referenced in chapter one. Where policymakers have constricted what counts as knowledge, funds of knowledge has expanded. I therefore apply this broadening idea of what sources count in knowledge construction to teachers. As embodied toolkits, I offer a frame that also liberates their knowledge sources outside the classroom walls. They, too, have multiple, "thick" ways of knowing, which should include personal experiences that understand them as individuals, and not a

monolithic group labeled “teachers.” Professional development attempts to indoctrinate teachers into mandated textbook use does not treat the teacher as a professional at all. Underlying these efforts is a thin view that teachers, who are mostly women and *because* they are women, are deskilled laborers who bring very little knowledge to the table (Apple, 1993). To conceive of teachers from a multi-faceted perspective, institutions must cross borders of their own thinking.

The ultimate border—the border between knowledge and power—can be crossed only when ... lived experiences become validated as a source of knowledge, and when the process of how knowledge is constructed and translated between groups located within nonsymmetrical relations of power is questioned. (Gonzalez, 2005, p. 42)

Viewing teachers as embodied toolkits crosses this border by probing into and “counting” the accumulated experiences of teachers’ life histories. Funds of knowledge refocuses learning, using the child and her history as a starting point.

By drawing on household knowledge, student experience is legitimated as valid, and classroom practice can build on the familiar knowledge bases that students can manipulate to enhance learning in mathematics, social studies, language arts, and other content areas. (p. 43)

Embodied toolkit translates this towards teachers and considers how the “counting” of these experiences is not only useful for their learning, but also meaningful in the enactment of classroom pedagogy.

## **Teacher Knowledge: Sara vis-à-vis Current Sociopolitical Ideologies**

**Understandings of language.** During my initial interview with Sara, I found linguistic and sociolinguistic understandings of language, as illustrated in examples that follow. With two Master's degrees—one as part of her teacher certification, and the other in teaching ESL students—Sara named the latter degree as providing the “most coursework” on language diversity. From this program, she highlighted a course on ESL/bilingual methodology, a linguistics course, and one on conversation analysis. In this coursework, she recalled learning linguistic and sociolinguistic concepts about AAL and other languages as well. The depth of knowledge Sara was able to recount to me within a forty-minute interview contradicts underlying ideologies about teacher knowledge packed within current sociopolitical reforms. The rhetoric surrounding movements to tighten teacher autonomy through script-reading says something about how society views teachers and what knowledge they bring to their classrooms. In this section, I first share Sara's knowledge, as referenced above. I then juxtapose that with literature that accounts for historical reasons teaching has become deprofessionalized, deskilled over time, and how those changes reflect sociopolitical views on teacher knowledge.

As I sought to draw out her knowledge of AAL during of initial interview, I asked her what she would want someone to know about the dialect. In this interview excerpt, you see Sara's linguistic and sociolinguistic understanding of AAL.

Alice: So if someone were to come up to you and ask you, what, you know, what should someone know about, you know, dialects and, you know, what is AAVE, what is all this stuff? How would you kind of describe that?

Sara: Well, I, I think one of the things I would probably focus on is the actual grammatical patterns, like the ‘be’ copula, that kind of thing. And [pause] how that’s also a pattern you find like in Russian and other languages too. So I think I’d probably stick with the grammatical aspect first, because I think there are many layers of this. What I see is that often teachers conflate AAVE and, um, slang. And, I don’t, I think if you get to the grammatical structures that something else, the shift in language and hip hop language and that’s another element of it. Um—

Alice: oh, go ahead

Sara: so that’s...and also rhetorical patterns. I would probably focus on that, coming from a linguistic background

Alice: mm-hmm. What do you mean by rhetorical patterns?

Sara: Um, so rhetorical patterns coming from maybe things like political speeches and sermons, so, um, use of repetition...things that anybody can leverage but we find common rhetorical patterns across African American speeches, especially important speeches. I’m thinking like Martin Luther, Martin Luther King Jr., but also reverends, so you find similar rhetorical patterns across time

As mentioned in the previous section, Sara understands the linguistic legitimacy of AAL. Her linguistic knowledge, however, spans to sociolinguistic understandings of the dialect as well. She names “rhetorical patterns,” such as “repetition,” citing “African American speeches,” like that of Martin Luther King Jr., and speech used by “reverends” as examples. She also connects “hip hop language” as “another element” to the “shift” in

AAL. Sara also shows her linguistic understanding of other languages, like Russian, when she names grammatical features of AAL.

In the previous excerpt, Sara mentions the “layers” within the AAL dialect. I ask her what she means by “layers,” and she discloses additional linguistic knowledge of dialects and languages.

Alice: And you said that there are other layers and stuff with it ... are the rhetorical patterns what you mean, by the layers?

Sara: I would say, I guess I would keep rhetorical patterns and grammatical structures. But also, contact among ... Africans and ... European Americans.

Like all of that impacts AAVE. Just like Swahili is a version of... Arabic, based on contact between Arab traders and Africans, then you get Swahili...so we also have ... the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, ... Creole, lots of other dialects are really specific. They have, it's all about vocabulary, about linguistic pattern, there's crossover, but those are true dialects, or, not true dialects, versions of the language. There's not anything, nothing linguistically different between the language and the dialect. Linguistically, they all function just as language.

The reason we call it a dialect is because it's not standard. Linguistically, there's nothing different between the two.

Here, Sara ties the “layers” of the dialect to its historical origins. She also shows her linguistic understanding between a dialect and a language, and in terms of functionality, their similarity. Sara reiterates this idea again, later in the interview, when asking her what her big “takeaways” were from the MTESL program, she identified one key concept as understanding that, linguistically, there is no difference between a dialect and language.



Alice: So, is that, would you say that's the biggest part of the [MTESL] program that you remember, like the big take away, in terms of dialect

Sara: ... the fact that linguistically there's nothing different between language and dialect ... linguistically, they function the same. It's just we call one a dialect and the other, a language, the standard language.

Alice: So there's almost kind of a politics even in terms of the naming.

Sara: Yes... and that's not even a political interpretation of language and dialect, it's like linguistically ... they don't function, different language and dialects don't function differently ... they're still rule-bound ... they're still shifting ... variation is regional in the US, so those are very, and even, AAVE is regional. It looks different on the eastern seaboard than it does in Chicago, than it does in LA, than it does in Atlanta. Um, so I think instead of saying there is this one standard, and then there's variations, like, we think there's a standard, but really there's lots and lots of variations, in pronunci—across, geographic areas too. In pronunciation, in the use of grammar, in um, vocabulary choices, everything that kind of makes up a language.

Sara reiterates that one of the things she remembers most from her MTESL program is the similar linguistic function between a dialect and language. She also shares her knowledge about the linguistic variation within AAL, based on geography.

Sara also had sociocultural understanding about language as well. When discussing what she learned about dialect through the MTESL program, Sara revealed an understanding about how language is used to convey meaning within social contexts.

Sara: In the MTESL program, we definitely read Labov ... and, because dialects occur across all languages. So it's not just unique to AAVE, and so with the linguistics program, you're going to look at how those dialects change. And they can even ... shifts in ... sociocultural expectations, how people use language, not just like the grammar or syntax, but

Alice: mm-hmm. Do you remember what class in the MTESL program it was?

Sara: ... I think I took an entire class on conversation analysis, and in that class, you could see how ... there were linguistic differences, like let's say between, ... Athabascan speakers ... from Alaska, native Americans from Alaska, because they are using a kind of English dialect as well. So it's not only in the language, in the grammar syntax, but also in, like how we do conversations, how we have ... language acts. That kind of thing. So expectations even around pauses and eye contact, ... so even though everybody's speaking in English, there are those differences in what's expected, during language acts, how to make a request, how to make an apology, so everybody's using language, and English even, but there are differences in how that is all done.

We see that Sara's knowledge of dialects is not limited to AAL, but also includes Athabascan speakers as well. She understands how language "shifts" in "sociocultural expectations" during "language acts," such as "expectations even around pauses and eye contact," "how to make a request," and "how to make an apology."

From the interview excerpts in this section, Sara's knowledge of language not only incorporates basic linguistic information, but also the ways culture and social contexts vary language use and meaning. In later chapters, we see how this sophisticated

linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge of language manifests in who Sara is as a teacher, in addition to how she utilizes it with linguistically diverse students.

**Sociopolitical views on teacher knowledge.** Sara's knowledge is in stark contrast to ideologies of teacher knowledge undergirding the current sociopolitical milieu of schooling. Apple (2000) points out, "Increasingly, teaching methods, texts, tests, and outcomes are being taken out of the hands of the people who must put them into practice. Instead, they are being legislated by national or state departments of education or in state legislatures" (p. 117). These policymakers, in effect, sanction privatized textbooks as legitimate knowledge over that which the teacher brings. What are the consequences for teachers refusing to adhere to such practices? Apple stated, "There are areas in the United States where it has been mandated that teachers must teach only that material which is in the approved textbook. Going beyond the 'approved' material risks administrative sanctions" (p. 114). The loss of autonomy for teachers to use varied texts, resources, *even themselves*, as sources of knowledge, is very telling of how teacher knowledge is constructed in our sociopolitical context. This phenomenon, though current, is not new. Policies deskilling teachers have a history tied to gender and labor.

Much of the attempt by state legislatures, departments of education, and "educational managers" to rationalize and standardize the process and products of teaching, to mandate very specific content and teaching, to define all teaching as a collection of measurable "competencies," and so on, is related to a longer history of attempts to control the labor of occupations that historically have been seen as women's paid work. That is, we do not think it is possible to understand why teachers are subject to greater control and to greater governmental intervention,

*and what the effects of such mandates are*, unless we step back and ask a particular kind of question. By and large, *who* is doing the teaching? (Apple, 2000, p. 117)

In short, “Women’s work is considered somehow inferior or of less status simply because it is women who do it” (Apple, 1988, p. 57). Given the gendered, deskilled state of this profession, what makes a teacher knowledgeable is the ability to read off and execute lessons prescribed in school-sanctioned textbooks. Teacher knowledge within our current political reform movements is irrelevant. I seek to problematize these social ideologies by showing how teachers like Sara are embedded with deep, sophisticated knowledge. From Sara’s case, we see how the meshing of her varied experiences shaped and contributed to who she is as a person. We will see in chapter six how they are salient for her as a teacher.

## **Conclusion**

The organic nature of qualitative research led this project in directions I could not have foreseen. In this chapter, I traced the analytic journey and development of embodied toolkit through my data. I showed how Sara’s personal life decisions/experiences meshed with and influenced her academic and professional ones, and vice versa. The first research project she participated in as a teacher fostered a significant personal relationship, which played a role in her personal life choices, as well as in her understanding of AAL-speaking students. Her MTESL program overlapped with her position as a graduate assistant for a research project on language diversity. From this position, she read many articles and extensively dialogued with professors about AAL. In her MTESL program, she also took coursework in bilingual/ESL methodology,

and learned how to develop lessons for linguistically diverse students. The data highlighted display a complex intertwinement of all her accumulated knowledge.

Woven throughout the analytic excerpts was literature consistent with my findings. Sociocultural views of knowledge and its construction confirm the significance of one's varied life experiences, and take a holistic approach in considering knowledge, context, and the person as a whole unit. Such a foundational premise delineates the role meshed experiences play in forming what we know and who we are. These ideologies undergird embodied toolkit. They refocus the teacher and her myriad experiences as a whole, who then performs in the classroom from her whole self. In the next chapter, we move to my other two cases (Raniya and Tiera) as iterations of embodied toolkit.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **RANIYA AND TIERA: AN EXPLORATION OF ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE**

In the last chapter, I proposed the notion of viewing teachers as embodied toolkits, as demonstrated through Sara's case, and theoretically supported from sociocultural conceptions of cognitive development. This chapter continues to explore this frame through the two cases—Raniya, early childhood in-service teacher, and Tiera, elementary pre-service teacher. I first consider what similarities existed among all three teachers, based on how they identified their knowledge about linguistic diversity and AAL, and then move towards the unique aspects of Raniya and Tiera. Like Sara, these two teachers also recounted experiences that meshed into various avenues of life, portraying the thick backgrounds from which they come. This chapter is devoted to highlighting their nuanced understandings of language, rooted in varied life journeys, which come to form their accumulated knowledge. The data used in this chapter come from initial interviews with teachers (mentioned in chapter three). The next chapter will construct each of the cases as embodied toolkits, as we examine the enactment of their accumulated knowledge into their classrooms.

#### **Similarities Across Cases**

An initial endeavor in this project was to find out what knowledge teachers have about AAL. In this section, I share themes found across each case as I revisit an initial research question: What knowledge do pre-service and in-service teachers know about linguistic diversity, particularly AAL? I found the following commonalities in teacher understanding of AAL: recognition of the linguistic legitimacy of AAL, ideas about its

historical origins/evolutionary nature of language, and the sociopolitical positionality of the dialect.

**Sara.** Sara, a high school in-service teacher, identified AAL as having “actual grammatical patterns,” naming the “be copula” as one of them. She also recognized that, “linguistically there’s nothing different between language and dialect,” because dialects are “rule-bound.” Her view, she said, is different from other colleagues at her school who “conflate AAVE” and “slang.” Sara was also able to point out the variation in AAL:

...variation is regional in the US ... AAVE is regional. It looks different on the eastern seaboard than it does in Chicago, than it does in LA, than it does in Atlanta. ... so I think instead of saying there is this one standard, and then there’s variations, like, we think there’s a standard, but really there’s lots and lots of variations ... across, geographic areas too. In pronunciation, in the use of grammar, in ... vocabulary choices, everything that kind of makes up a language.

In her explanation of AAL as having geographic variation, Sara also identifies three basic features—pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary—that linguists use as a litmus test for linguistic legitimacy. In between the previous interview excerpt, and the one below, Sara shared how she likened the historical formation of AAL to that of the Swahili language.

She explained that AAL was a result of “contact among Africans” and “European Americans,” just as Swahili formed out of diverse groups merging:

Just like Swahili is a version of ... Arabic, based on contact between Arab traders and Africans, then you get Swahili... if you go into like the Eastern Seaboard of the United States, we also have ... Creole, lots of other dialects .... They have, it’s

all about vocabulary, about linguistic pattern, there's crossover, but those are true dialects, or, not true dialects, versions of the language.

Here we see that her understanding of language, including AAL, is one that is historically situated, and a production of social interactions among varied linguistic populations. We also get a glimpse of Sara's awareness of the dialect's broader sociopolitical positionality within her school's mainstream ideology. A little later in the interview, Sara clarified what she would and would not include in informing teachers about AAL, and in the process, she shares her perception of other teachers' beliefs.

Alice: When you were talking about, kind of the crossing between, um, ah, the European and, um, the Africans, are you talking about, like the formation of AAVE, is that what you're referring to?

Sara: Yes

Alice: Yeah

Sara: Yeah

Alice: So are you saying you would include that or you would not include that when you're talking to teachers about that?

Sara: Huh [sigh]. When I'm talking to teachers? [pause] I don't know if I'd go all that far because teachers are mostly kind of at the point, like [in nasal, imitating voice] "these kids can't read and write. They can't even talk!"

Alice: [laughs]

Sara: you know, so that's where [pause] teachers land.

Alice: Right

Sara: Not all teachers. There's many of us—



Alice: Right, yeah—

Sara: That kind of land there.

Alice: yeah

Sara: So I don't know how much more, like in my team, I share materials, but I don't completely push it.

From Sara's perspective, "many" teachers "land" in a place where they believe that AAL-speaking students "can't read and write," and where "they can't even talk." Teachers who view AAL-speaking students in such a way clearly have deficit learning views of them. These deficit views are consistent with broader societal views, as stated in chapter two, degrading AAL-speakers on a fabricated political hierarchy. Sara's articulation of other teachers' deficit views cues us in to her hierarchical understanding of the dialect within her school. In proceeding chapters, Sara's sociopolitical awareness of the dialect's positionality will be made more evident. We also see evidence of her linguistic, historical, and sociopolitical awareness of AAL. Raniya, too, shared similar understandings.

**Raniya.** Like Sara, Raniya understood AAL as a rule-bound dialect, situated within a social group, sitting within a hierarchy formed by social views. During our initial interview, Raniya shared about what she learned in a graduate class on linguistics.

Raniya: ...looking at different types of ... dialects, and just how the English language has evolved over the years just from ... the King's English – thees and thous, ... and how language, we may be talking the same, just the nuances of *how* we say things...someone from this part of the Unites States may talk with a different accent, or may pronounce vowels or letters different, so when they talk,

they just sound like, they have a southern accent. Pretty much talking and saying the same things but you can tell that person is from St. Louis. Oh- they're from New York or north shore, ... it's just *how*, they've learned language, just thought that was kind of interesting. Talking about AAVE, which I never knew what it was growing up [laughs], oh, it's a like a formal thing [in question upward tone, laughing] ... and that there are rules, just like any other dialect, language ... I just know that I can kinda code-switch. It's just natural for me to do it, but I just never knew the background as being kind of rules and everything else involved in language.

Here we see that while Raniya did not know that AAL was a “formal thing” before, she now views it “like any other dialect, language,” and with “rules.” We also see her understanding of the English language as one that has “evolved,” varies by geography, and used in social groups. While she does not explicitly talk about the historical origins of AAL, her mention of the historical evolution of English points to an understanding of the shifting nature of language. Later in the interview, she refers back to this shift, and links it to a sociopolitical awareness of the dialect’s positionality.

Raniya: ...just thinking about ... the English language itself. I mean, we say it's standard but it's really not stagnant, you know? So, to say that someone is not speaking properly, you know I'm pretty sure that (laughs) if people were alive then they would probably say that we are not speaking very proper either. It would be like totally slang. Gosh, what are they saying those are not appropriate words. So ... I just think that it's about perspective. And how the language is accepted by (pause) or how you speak is accepted by (pause) ... the broader

audience ... or the powers that be, or the people who are making the decisions to say this is an acceptable way to speak, versus this is not an acceptable way to speak.

Based on the changes in the English language, Raniya, here, challenges the notion of English as a “standard” language, with some “speaking properly,” and others not. Instead, she poses language as something that is “accepted by” those with “power” to decide what is “acceptable.” The discussion of what is standard, embedded in power structures that determine social acceptance, reveal Raniya’s knowledge of linguistic hierarchies. While sharing about one of the papers she wrote, Raniya provided further evidence by alluding to a California law that addressed this linguistic hierarchy within schooling.

Raniya: ... so I think it [the California law] was basically to protect them. A lot of the kids were held up to a certain standard ... But I think the students who spoke AAVE were penalized for how they spoke, ... there weren't a lot of supports for them ...

When I asked Raniya what her response was to the law and the events surrounding it, she talked more about fairness in schooling.

Raniya: my thought, was that it [AAL] should be recognized, just like Spanish would or any other language ... If the scholars are saying it is a language, then I'm thinking well they should honor that. But they don't want to extend the benefits or they don't have the resources to be able to extend the benefits to every language group, so to speak. But I just think that's a little unfair that they would do that.

Raniya’s linkage of issues of fairness to AAL-speaking students in schools, again, helps us see her understanding of AAL positioned as a socially devalued dialect.

**Tiera.** Like Raniya, Tiera’s exposure to AAL as linguistically legitimate also came through academic coursework. In the excerpt below, Tiera discusses such learning from a college language course.

Tiera: ...when I came to college and we had that [required language course] and they were talking about all of the rules and stuff, and I was just like “oh yeah ...that’s right, and this is right, ...oh, so AAVE really is a language...I...never really knew. I *knew* that it was a language, but I really didn’t.

From examining the linguistic rules behind AAL, Tiera recalls learning that “AAVE really is a language.” Her comment that she simultaneously “*knew* that it was a language” and “really didn’t,” suggests multiple ways of understanding the dialect. Her “knowing” in this excerpt is linked to learning about “the rules” of AAL, and thus its legitimacy from a linguistic perspective. In examples later in this chapter, I provide data that shows her “knowing” AAL as legitimate due to its communicative function within her household and community.

From the language course Tiera mentioned above, she also shared how the course helped her see the shifting nature of language. Below, she describes learning about changes in language across geographical regions.

Tiera: ...I think it was just great to have...different videos that really showed us how language is original, how...it’s not just a set language...’cause even the standard English that we use in Illinois is still different than the language that we use in DC or the language that you use in California. So it all changes...

This excerpt shows how Tiera understands language is not “set,” and “changes” across region within a country. Language, as Tiera understands it, not only varies by location,

but also through social groups in time. When I asked her how she would define AAL, Tiera gave the following explanation:

...it's a common language used primarily with African American people that derives from slavery times actually, 'cause we weren't given, ... the chance to read and write, we just picked up on what the master said and we picked it up to our best ability. And so our language derives from there... it is commonly used with the African American people, but it is not, it should not be a direct representation of our intelligence.

Tiera provides a historical context and development of AAL that is linked to a particular group of people. Her statement that “it is not,” and “it should not,” be linked to “our intelligence” reveals her awareness of stereotypical, deficit views of AAL and the individuals that speak it. As part of our conversation about what she learned in the language course mentioned above, Tiera shared about the shift in acceptance of linguistic diversity in the classroom. In our discussion, she again reveals her awareness of the dialect's sociopolitical positionality.

Tiera: ...it was interesting to see how we've come to a place to where we're looking at how language affects the learning, and how accepting one's language can really produce benefits...academic benefits, 'cause I know... if you speak AAVE, they automatically think you're poor, you're not educated, and you don't know how to conduct yourself.

Tiera identifies stereotypes that situate AAL as devalued language within society—“poor,” “not educated,” and “don't know how to conduct yourself.” The similarities in knowledge of AAL across cases provide a sample of what each teacher knows and how

they understand AAL. In the remaining chapter, I examine the facets of Raniya and Tiera's knowledge of AAL, as well as the experiences shaping such knowledge.

### **Raniya: Glimpses of her Accumulated Knowledge**

Raniya is an in-service, early childhood teacher, who has taught within the same school district for fourteen years; thirteen of those have been at the same early childhood school I observed her teach. With an undergraduate degree in early childhood education, and in the process of completing a Master's in teaching ESL (MTESL) program, Raniya shared aspects of her background, education, and work life. Raniya is an African American female, who identifies herself as a "mixed" AAL-speaker, since AAL is not the language she is most accustomed to using. In her fourteen years with the school, Raniya has been the only African American classroom teacher there. She is also endorsed in special education and ESL. My aim in this section is to highlight some of the experiences Raniya shared with me regarding linguistic diversity, particularly AAL. These experiences, though situated within a particular event, traversed her thinking across academic, professional, and personal arenas in her life. The interweaving of them throughout "categories" helps us better understand Raniya, as a whole. I argue that these interconnections are evidence of the construction of herself and her accumulated knowledge. My goal, therefore, is to set-up elements that contribute to Raniya as an embodied toolkit, through the meshing of her life experiences. A unique feature of Raniya's accumulated knowledge is her extensive knowledge of language acquisition.

**Meshing of experiences.** From data collected, I found experiences often began in one "category" of her personal, academic, or professional life, and then flowed into the others. A consistent theme that ran throughout Raniya's enmeshed experiences was her

propensity to apply academic and personal experiences toward consideration for her students. In examples that follow, we will see that Raniya is a teacher who shares some common linguistic background with her AAL-speaking students, is attuned to the treatment of Black students in school, and applies new learning to reflect on her own pedagogical practices.

**Background.** During our interview, I inquired into Raniya's sources for learning about language diversity. Raniya identified two graduate courses, a linguistics course, and a course about culture in classrooms. She also identified her experiences at the school she had been working at for thirteen years. These experiences included work with diverse students, which she called "on the job training," as well as with staff members, like the multicultural coordinators who functioned as liaisons between the school and families. These positions existed as a result of the thirteen different languages spoken at the school, the Spanish-speaking bilingual classes, and to provide cultural resources for teachers.

Raniya also had her own linguistic background, as we all do. In the previous section, one of the interview excerpts detailed her understanding of the evolution of language. While talking about what she learned in her graduate linguistics course, she applies this new knowledge to her own personal experiences. Raniya's response below is preceded with comments about how language could vary by accent or geography. The conversation then moves to Raniya reflecting on her own experiences speaking AAL.

Raniya: ... Talking about AAVE, which I never knew what it was growing up [laughs], oh, it's a like a formal thing [in question upward tone, laughing] so, ... there are rules, just like any other dialect, language, and so ... I don't really know

the rules myself. I just know that I can kinda code-switch. It's just natural for me to do it, but I just never knew the background as being kind of rules and everything else involved in language. So that was very interesting about the class.

From this new knowledge, we see Raniya consider her own linguistic background, and think about how her language use fits in with AAL. In this way, she meshes an academic experience into her personal life. Curious by how Raniya identified herself as a language speaker, later in the interview, I inquired into this. While this next excerpt does not necessarily show intersections in various avenues of her life, we garner a fuller picture of her linguistic background. We also see her understanding of AAL-speakers on a spectrum, as she positions herself on it. Viewing language skills on a spectrum is a theme that runs throughout her case, as will be shown in more detail in chapter six. In the exchanges below, Raniya talks about her proficiency in AAL, as well as various experiences that shaped her language learning.

Alice: Would you identify yourself as an AAVE speaker?

Raniya: um (pause)

Alice: ... you said before ... you code switched

Raniya: mmhmm

Alice: so---

Raniya: so I guess I would say yes, ... the more I learn about it, I would say yes

Alice: okay

Raniya: only because ... I have the ability (pause) to, ... I wouldn't say I was brought out of it (in whisper), I adapted ... standard English a lot faster than my



peers. I wouldn't say that I'm a strong, you know what I mean?, I can't go all the way there, but I can, you know, yeah.

Alice: yeah. So you feel proficient. (laughs)--

Raniya: (laughs)--

Alice: not deficient (during laugh)...

Raniya: right! (enthusiastically)... And then just auditorily, ... just listening ... growing up around ... kids who talked like this ... I would probably pick it up maybe after the first time, definitely the second time....

Alice: ... what would you consider your home language, or the language that you are most comfortable speaking?

Raniya: (pause) I would say, see, it's more mixed.

Alice: okay

Raniya: yeah, I would say my home language is more mixed. Cause even my mom ... she grew up in Arkansas, and she has southern ways of saying things, but ... she came up north when she was small ... So she was still in elementary school when she came from the south, whereas my aunts and my older uncles, definitely just got this southern ... accent and black English is a little bit more prevalent ... so I would say it's a mix...

Alice: ... You wouldn't consider yourself a strong of AAVE speaker?

Raniya: right ... I'm just looking at the effort it would take for me ... I can read it, ... like “why you be teaching math in the afternoon?” [quote from AAL-speaking boy from Wheeler article]... I can hear how he would be asking it, but as far as me

(pause), it would take a little effort for me to just convey my thoughts and ...  
translate it ... to true ... AAVE

Raniya characterizes herself as a “mixed” AAL and “standard English” speaker. She does so because she can read and understand the oral language, but finds it difficult to “convey my thoughts” and “translate” what she wants to say into AAL. In part, she feels that this is due to her learning “standard English a lot faster than my peers,” and also her mother’s migration to the North as a child. Her mention of peers and her mother’s language helps us see the role, as Raniya interprets it, others had in her own language development. In the next section, Raniya again reflects on her own experiences to relate to those of her students.

*Attunement toward treatment of Black students.* In the interview excerpts that follow, Raniya meshes personal and academic experiences toward her professional life, as she reflects on how those experiences have implications toward Black students in schooling. The examples in this section, and the next, show Raniya’s propensity to be mindful of her students, in their different walks of life, and what changes she can make within her own pedagogy to meet their needs.

This first excerpt comes from a part of the interview in which I gave Raniya the Wheeler excerpt (referenced in chapter three) to read, which comes right after the last excerpt in the previous section, in which Raniya identified herself as a “mixed” AAL-speaker. After she read the passage, I asked if she had any experiences similar to the one the child from the Wheeler excerpt experienced, being corrected for dialect use.

Alice: ... so you don't have any personal experiences like this or being corrected of your English...?

Raniya: (pause) hmmm. Have I ever been corrected? (Pause) ... like I said, I learn so quickly, I picked up on it

Alice: ... as a young child

R: yeah, ... first grade would probably be an experience, ... I couldn't recall any specific experience but I just remember, it was a white teacher, And she was just really, like we would read. And she would correct, like "okay you say it, you don't say it like this, you say it like *this*. I just remember ... her ... correcting, not necessarily ... an incident with me, ... her telling me, but just as a whole class ... but when I was in second grade, I moved and my teacher ... was Black. ... almost all my teachers were Black, up and through eighth grade ... so that was a little different and I think they (pause) ... that makes a difference, I would say.

Whereas in this area, ... the teachers are predominately White, ... as far as by the numbers, so that's probably the only thing that saved myself (laughs) ... from having that experience. And I just ... learned ... how to talk.

As Raniya reflects on her own early experiences being corporately corrected for AAL-usage, she identifies the racial change of teachers “mak[ing] a difference” for the way she predicts she would have been treated. She considers her own teaching context, with teachers “in this area” who are “predominantly White,” and how having majority Black teachers “saved” her “from having that [correction for AAL-use] experience.” From Raniya’s perspective, race matters for the types of experiences children encounter, from her childhood and even now. As she meshes her own experiences as a Black girl with children she encounters at work, her insights around race reveal an attunement towards the way Black children are treated. It is important to note that my reference of “Black

students” is not to imply all Black students are AAL-speakers, and vice versa. However, from Raniya’s experience, even though she was a “mixed” AAL-speaker, she was still corporately corrected, “as a whole class,” as a Black student. It is this indiscriminate assumption of Black students, and their mistreatment based on race, that I speak to in this section.

We further see Raniya’s attention toward inequitable treatment of Black students and their families. In the example below, Raniya shares about a book she read for one of the previously mentioned graduate courses. She relates what she learned from this book to consider inequities within schooling.

Raniya: ... The Trouble with Black Boys was a ... really powerful book and ... touched on so many issues that just culturally black males face, ... it also included Hispanic males. ... it talked about the limited access ... coming from, Mexico ... limitations ... going to college because of ... citizenship, ... acquiring student loans and all that. ... it just kinda really opened my eyes up to a lot of different issues just within the school system and with ... tracking kids and the way that we even treat parents. ... one parent [in the book] ... came up there [the school in the book] for something and the principal didn't even acknowledge her ... But another parent from a different persuasion ... came in and she [the principal in the book] was, "oh hi" (in high-pitched tone) "how are you, who are you, ... wow what a huge difference [retelling the author’s remark]... even the parents are treated in the school ... shouldn't everyone get the same treatment? ... because a certain person talked a certain way or maybe looked a certain way they would

pass judgment. ... it's just touched ... a lot of different things ... in society ... the stereotypes, and ... put me in a frame of mind.

Here, Raniya talks about the inequities of both Black and Latino students in school. Reading about educational opportunities not afforded to those with “limited access” and through “tracking kids” helped “open my eyes” to the differential treatment of students in schools. This treatment also extended to the way some parents were perceived and acknowledged by school representatives. Raniya’s linkage between this academic text to her professional life demonstrates what occurs between new experiences and existing ones. In this incident, new learning meshes with, and is framed within her current context of schooling. She continues to mesh new learning with the context of her own classroom and students in the next section.

*New learning and reflection on pedagogy.* At one point in the interview, Raniya had shared about a shift in perspective about AAL, from informal communication to a formal language. I asked her what caused this shift for her. She mentioned reading articles on the topic, but also physically seeing the dialect “on paper.” She discussed how “dissecting it,” “mapping out” the language, its “patterns,” and learning about the “technical parts of speech,” helped Raniya understand AAL as “more a physical thing,” versus something you hear, and then “you don't really pick up on a lot.” She continued on about the significance of seeing AAL in literature and using that literature for instruction.

Raniya: ... you don't come across them [AAVE books] all that often. But just ... having it purposely used and demonstrated to show. She even read Flossie and the Fox, ... Dr. A read it to us (laughs) it was interesting because she was like to

go into a whole ‘nother, her voice was, she had to get into character and how this southern girl was talking ... to this fox, and how sassy she was and how the words kind of flowed off her tongue. You really have to be thinking about those things and slowing it down and discussing them to ... see that all those things are happening.

Raniya discussed how the professor’s oral reading of the book in southern Black English was “interesting” to her. Raniya perceived the reader’s strategy of using another voice as being able to “get into character,” which entailed showing “how sassy she [Flossie] was” and Flossie’s linguistic ability, as “the words kind of flowed off her tongue.” The performance of the book was followed by topics the class discussed, as well as Raniya’s thoughts about how an oral reading like this could be beneficial in her own classroom.

Raniya: ... it was helpful because we talked about even in our own classrooms how we can bring elements of that ... and then how important it is for us, ... step outside from that culture, step outside the box and read something that is representative of the kids that we serve ... even though she was speaking the way she was speaking, it was like she was also an intellectual, she was ... outsmarting this fox ... like she was leading him on the whole time, and she gets away and the fox is thinking he's ahead of the game and he's the sly fox going to trick you. And the girl (laughs) duked him at the end. (Stops to laugh). ...a lot of things going on in that book. The language, the story as a whole, the pictures of the southern girl, her dress and her little braids ... so it just brings that whole cultural element to the classroom. And just having somebody read it, talking about voice, when you read stories to kids you almost have to take on the voice of characters. And that's how

she was demonstrating it, taking on the voice of the character. Even though that wasn't her voice, she was taking that on, and then just having kids seeing you do that. Because if you're reading a book, like if I'm reading a book about cowboys, I'm going to have a nice cowboy accent ...

Among the “elements” that could be incorporated in classrooms are the importance in “step[ping] outside the box,” and reading “something that is representative of the kids that we serve.” By reading in southern Black English, Raniya points out how usage of the dialect can be linked to being “an intellectual.” Raniya also mentions the importance of having “that whole cultural element” present in the classroom, which includes the auditory presence of varying dialects, and visual representations, such as Flossie’s “little braids.” Raniya’s connection of this experience to her own classroom demonstrates how new knowledge becomes enmeshed with her existing role as teacher. Other academic experiences, as well, also informed this role.

The next three examples are part of a portion of the interview in which Raniya discusses an assignment from the graduate course on culture and classrooms, called “out of the box experiences.” The assignment required her to participate in two events that were culturally and linguistically different from her own. She chose to attend a Catholic mass in Spanish, and a Methodist church service in Korean. She said that she “took a lot from those experiences” which she would “remember for a long time.” She recalls hearing familiar Christmas tunes, like “O come all ye faithful,” sung in Korean. While listening to the pastor deliver his message in Korean, she remembers feeling like she didn’t know what was going on, but just “follow[ing] along.” From these experiences,

she then transitions to think about how her own students from different cultural or linguistic backgrounds may feel.

Raniya: ... and then ... you kind of put yourself in the position of what your students might feel like when they're coming from a different place ... maybe in the United States or not even in the United States, abroad, and they come into a classroom where the culture is different and so is the language. So it's like "oh so this is how it" (giggles, pause) ... my child that just came from the Philippines feels or they're from Guatemala and from different places or they just came from Africa, ... you just know how they feel ... taking cues from your environment, and looking at what other people are doing, just finding everything you can to just ... connect... Visuals are so key, 'cause I'm so glad they had the little board up there and they were ... showing as they were singing. They had a nice little picture of baby Jesus...so "oh" that's what they're singing about ...(laughing)

As Raniya takes this new experience, and places herself "in the position of what your students might feel like," she meshes learning from this graduate course (academic life) to her existing role as teacher (professional life). From this experience, Raniya also highlighted ways she attempted to "connect" with the environment—"visuals" were "key," as well as "cues" and "looking at what other people are doing." Later, in chapter six, these same strategies recur in her classroom pedagogy. Also important to note from this example is the way Raniya talks about students from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds, including both those from within and outside the United States. The inclusion of those from within the United States reveals a heterogeneous understanding of her students, and that variation of culture and language does not only



come those from other countries. She understands the variation on cultures among all groups and intuitively shows that labels, such as, “Asian,” “Latino” or “Black” are insufficient when considering student language. Again, in chapter six, we will see how her fluid view of language learners plays a role in her pedagogy.

As the conversation progressed, Raniya shared about becoming “aware of those who may have different ... cultural backgrounds than yourself.” Factors that helped in this new environment was having an “anchor,” such as a person from the Korean service who greeted her and acknowledged her as a newcomer, as well as “slowing things down.” She wondered how such factors “could apply to my own classroom.” Again, we see how Raniya meshes new insights into her current role in the classroom. Below she further details the mental and emotional aspect of this experience.

Raniya: ... it's almost like you're waiting for ... if somebody's talking, it's like I don't know what you're saying, you're just waiting for that one word, or that cognate or something ... that sounds like an English word ... to just like follow, ... you're looking for that space where you can find a spot and try to follow... 'cause it does take a lot of mental capacity, to ... understand what they're saying. ... it would help when they spoke with their hands, so I just kind a like knew, oh they might be talking about this.

Raniya describes her anticipation as she is “waiting for that one word,” and “try[ing] to follow” and “find a spot” in order to understand her new context. This process took “a lot of mental capacity.” The usage of visuals, such as hand gesturing, helped in communication. Visuals, as we see from this example and the one above, are recurring strategies Raniya mentions. The significance of this pattern will play out in her

instructional practices, which will be detailed in chapter six. Raniya takes the experience, as described above, and considers what sorts of similar experiences her students may face.

... being in another person shoes that might be experiencing another culture and in another language, ... knowing what it feels like ... makes all the difference in the world, because without knowing that, without me experiencing that ... is just really hard, you can kind of sympathize with the kid ... I'm reading that story in English and I'm showing the pictures and I'm pointing but I can tell ... when they have just said, "okay I'm done with this story, I don't know what she's talking about,"...lost somewhere, if I don't have enough props ... If I'm not making it relate to them, what they can ... understand, it's just talking. And they don't get it.  
(Laughs)

For Raniya, it “makes all the difference in the world” putting herself “in another person’s shoes.” In the process of connecting this new experience within her current frame as a teacher, the experience of being a cultural and linguistic outsider becomes embedded in her view of students who may feel like outsiders within her classroom.

**Knowledge of language acquisition.** As will be shown in this section, a major distinguishing element of Raniya from the other cases was her knowledge of language acquisition. Earlier in this chapter, I included data in which Raniya recounted her learning about the English language and its dialects in a linguistics course. In this same course, Raniya also shared about learning “how people in general acquire language,” and recalls learning about the “acquisition process” as “being really good.” She expanded on this when I asked her about “key points” she learned regarding this topic, in this course. I have broken up her response into the following four excerpts, in order to highlight

aspects of Raniya's knowledge. In this first excerpt, Raniya explains how language acquisition begins with the baby engaging in receptive skills.

Raniya: I remember looking at a video and it ... dispelled some myths ... a lot of people may think that ... even with babies or ... that it's only when they get ready to verbally speak that that's when they ... acquire language, but language acquisition itself ... starts early on, ... maybe even in the womb, because they're hearing these different sounds ... of the language. Some languages have ... more clicks, ... or there may be an absence of certain sounds in different languages, but as the mother's talking and they're talking to other people, ... that's when ... the rhythm of the speech and ... everything starts to ... connect.

Raniya clarifies "myths" of babies who begin speaking out of nowhere. They begin to form ideas about language through listening, even before birth, to those in their social context. The variance in phonemic systems across different languages influences the baby's ideas about language, and eventually, the way they make sense of it. Her ideas hearken back to Chomskian notions of a universal grammar, in which humans innately acquire language through our senses. Raniya further discusses how this receptive process continues after birth.

Raniya: And then even after the baby's born, what they're listening to receptively ... they begin to take in, to ... watch and see. ... then there's another process, ... they go into ... sounds they hear, da da, ma ma, whatever, ... play with language in a way. And then after that ... a period ... where they're ... just putting together sentences. It may not always be in the same order, but they just learn ... certain rules ... of how language goes ... putting it together.

Here Raniya describes how the baby transitions from a place of receptive “watch[ing] and see[ing]” toward a more active “play with language.” The playing with sounds, “da da, ma ma,” eventually grow to become sentences.

Raniya: We were thinking ... when teaching kids how to talk, if you say it to them a certain way... they’re mimicking exactly what you say but there’s no way ... they can ... mimic everything... But they start actually putting together and forming their own ... sentences ... so I thought that was ... pretty cool... And after that of course they ... go on to full sentences and begin to ... rationalize and just talk like little people (laugh) ...

Sentence construction, as Raniya has framed above, is not simply about combining or extending the length of sounds. Children form “full sentences” as a part of “rationaliz[ing]” what they want to say. From this segment of Raniya’s response, she reveals an understanding of language that goes deeper than structure alone. Undergirding her idea of language acquisition as “play,” is a view that language is an interactive, communicative process. Hence, she clarifies that “teaching kids how to talk,” is not done through having them mimic “exactly what you say.” Raniya applies this logic to her AAL-speaking students. The conversation she references below comes from dialogue with her staff about assessing AAL-speaking students to a particular language standard.

... when we were had conversations about ... if a kid does come in with their home language ... African American vernacular for instance, ... some teachers may think, “well if only ...correcting them or ... telling them the right way to say it is gonna help.” And that was one of the reasons why [laughs] ... it really doesn’t help, because their rules and how they are talking ... it’s just ... what they’re

going to do. So correcting them is not gonna necessarily make them say it your way... it goes against how they acquired ... the language anyway. You've got to go through ...the same steps and the same process ... for them to actually embrace it and begin to speak ... more standard English.

Raniya points out common practices teachers often utilize when attempting to teach AAL-speaking students how to speak “standard English.” Teachers employing such techniques (“correcting them” and “telling them”) are humorous to Raniya because, based on her understanding of language acquisition, usage of these strategies “goes against how they acquired” language and “really doesn’t help.” By recounting how language acquisition works, “You’ve got to go through the same steps and the same process,” Raniya offers alternative pedagogy for fostering proficiency in other dialects. Consideration for how AAL-speakers acquired the language reminds us of Hyme’s work in broadening ideas of language acquisition to include social groups of those speaking varied dialects.

In the previous interview excerpts, Raniya traces language acquisition beginning from the mother’s womb and details the process children undergo to “talk like little people” and function as communicative beings. Central to Raniya’s explanation of this process is the child’s interaction with those in the environment, and thus, the social nature of language. She points out that the significance of this process for AAL-speaking students is in understanding theoretically sound, versus unsound, practices when fostering fluency in other dialects. Interestingly, throughout this section documenting her extensive knowledge about language acquisition, Raniya interweaves this knowledge with that of her students. That is, what started as an experience in her graduate

coursework, meshed with her experiences at her work, with staff and students. For Raniya, her academic and professional background, as well as her personal interests, form her as a teacher, rich with knowledge about language acquisition, and as an advocate for AAL-speaking students among her staff. These combined elements acquaint us with Raniya's accumulated knowledge. In the next section, we continue with the exploration of Tiera's accumulated knowledge.

### **Tiera: Glimpses of Her Accumulated Knowledge**

During this project, Tiera was a pre-service teacher enrolled in her final semester as an undergraduate elementary education major. The information gathered and detailed in this section comes from our initial interviews together (as referenced in chapter 3). As an African American female, and also native AAL-speaker, Tiera shares about her background, experiences, and future goals. What she garnered from all of these experiences meshed in ways that have come to formulate her accumulated knowledge. From the data I collected at that time, I came to understand Tiera as a teacher, whose teaching philosophy and view of AAL was significantly shaped by her personal experiences. This may be logical, given the point at which she was in her career, in comparison to the other cases. However, despite whatever prevailing views may be linked to pre-service teachers, in terms of the "amount" of knowledge they may or may not have, I aim to show how Tiera offers many ideas and ideologies about teaching. Her thoughts, documented here, are informed by her accumulated knowledge, which explore the myriad experiences she carries, particularly those related to her family background, past academic experiences, and social groups she takes part in. This section first explores her linguistic background and a sampling of how interwoven Tiera's personal, academic,

and professional life are. I then discuss her teaching philosophy and view of AAL, and in the process, show how each are informed by various avenues of her life, with overlapping themes running through them.

**Background as native AAL-speaker.** During our initial interview, Tiera shared about how she considered AAL as her first language, and thus, herself as a native AAL-speaker. She referenced AAL as being her “comfort language,” since that was the dialect most spoken in her household and community. As I asked her to unpack what she meant by “comfort language,” Tiera explained why she calls it such, and nuances, for her, in speaking AAL.

Alice: ...I remember you talking ...about...this being your comfort language...how you described it...AAL being your comfort language. Can you tell me a little more about that?

Tiera: ...I was saying how it’s just like an easy language...use with your friends, or if you are just walking down the street, you really don’t have to think much, it just comes out....when I’m talking, I don’t have to think that much nowadays...is the verb...is it matching, is it singular or plural? ...do I use ... ‘there is’ or ‘there are?’.. I don’t have to do that in my head now because ...I’m just so used to the sentence structure ... but when you speak...standard English language, more thought goes into ... than if I’m speaking AAVE...

As a native AAL-speaker, the dialect is an “easy language” that she does not have to “think much” about the grammatical structure when using. It is also a natural form of communication within her social contexts—friends and those she interacts with “walking down the street.” Tiera’s usage of AAL also differs in pronunciation.

...it's not even...whether it's plural or singular...am I enunciating my words to where all of the letters are getting the right sound? So if I'm saying "let's go to the car" or "let's go to the store" that's the academic English. For AAVE, it's like, "let's go to the stoh" or "let's go to the cah" or like "whatcha doin'." It's not like "what are you doing?" ...sometimes I'm just cutting off the end of the word and so I think that's where the comfort comes... AAVE is a very lazy tongue and I have to realize that ... and so the comfort comes in where you don't have to...enunciate everything, and that you know that the person you're talking to, that they're not judging you because they speak the same language. And they perfectly understand you. 'Cause I know...when I read this [referring to the Wheeler excerpt], I read it like a normal sentence. I just said it like "Mrs. Swords, why you be teachin' maf in da afternoon?" and I knew...it was "math" and "teaching"... "the"...I knew everything...it's just a comfort language of ... being easy going and not having to think so much into what you're gonna say. And your tongue can be as lazy as you want it to be.

For Tiera, part of the "comfort" in speaking AAL is the ways in which her tongue is accustomed to AAL pronunciation. Like the previous excerpt, Tiera talks about the dialect in reference to the people with which she uses it. When communicating with another AAL-speaker, there is also comfort in knowing "that they're not judging you." She explains this by using the boy in the Wheeler excerpt as an example. When he asks his question in AAL, Tiera talks about how she, as a native AAL-speaker, "knew everything" he was trying to communicate to his teacher. To her, the pronunciation and sentence structure was a "normal sentence." Even though we see AAL as what is



“normal” for Tiera, she also learned to speak LWC, what she refers to as “standard English.” Her reference to AAL as a “very lazy tongue,” from a superficial standpoint, appears to be consistent with deficit views of the language. However, a later subsection on her view of AAL will provide deeper analysis of this issue. As will be shown, Tiera’s understanding of AAL is complex, and she, like the rest of us, is in the process of making meaning of the experiences in her social world. The example below details some of her experiences in broadening her linguistic repertoire.

**Becoming bidialectal.** In the interview, Tiera shared about her experiences learning to become fluent in LWC. For her, the process was marked by correction from both home and school (to a lesser degree). As Tiera explained it during another point in the interview, their correction was not “detrimental” to her because she was unable to recall specific moments resulting in strong, negative emotion. Below is part of a conversation we had about her experiences being corrected for AAL-use in her schooling. Tiera also reveals her knowledge about what she deemed appropriated language for particular settings.

Tiera: ...it must not have been that important if I can’t remember it...if it was something that was painful, or something that ... really made me ponder about my entire existence of why am I even in school, then I would’ve remembered that. I don’t have a memory...

Alice: do you think part of it is because you didn’t use AAVE in school?

Tiera: ... I know I used it...because I still use it now, I just know that it wasn’t like... that prevalent in my school language. I knew how to speak when I was speaking to my principle or if I was speaking to a teacher...

Alice: ...maybe they [your teachers] didn't hear it to correct you or maybe they did correct you but it wasn't that a big of deal? ...

Tiera: I think they did correct me. It sounds kind of clouded ... because in high school ... I remember my teachers correcting me. I just didn't use it as much, like I knew, it was probably times where it slipped out...it was just in the flow of a conversation and it just went to my common language, because I remember...teachers, it's very vaguely. But I know for a fact I that used AAVE because I used to use it at home and I know I used it on the playground, and I know I used it in the classroom. And I used to always sit by the teacher's desk, so they...heard me... and I know I used it in the discussion, every now and then, I just don't have that moment where I remember exactly what I said and my teacher corrected me this way.

Tiera reasoned that since she did not have a "memory" that made her "ponder about my entire existence of why am I even in school," her teachers' correction must not have been "painful." Because Tiera said that AAL was not "that prevalent" in her "school language," I wondered if perhaps teachers did not correct what they did not hear. Tiera's recollection of their correction also includes memories of to whom and where she spoke AAL. She reveals that AAL was used in her home, on the playground, but not with her principal or teacher. Tiera's linguistic background was an important element in the personal experiences she shared with me, and will be further explored in her teaching philosophy and views on AAL.

**Personal life meshing with professional and academic goals.** Few pre-service teachers remain local to the college town in which Tiera received her degree, for a variety

of reasons. The school districts surrounding this college town have sizeable low-income populations, many of who are African American and Latino. Instead, most return to their hometowns or surrounding communities, hoping to teach in districts that consist of student populations mirroring their own racial and class background. Tiera, however, when asked where her “ideal future placement” would be, shared her hopes to attain a teaching position within one of the local school districts in which she did her student teaching. The ensuing excerpts detail her future professional and academic goals, which mesh with one another, and are equally interwoven with factors from her personal life. This section serves as a sampling for the complexity within Tiera’s life, and to showcase how such enmeshed experiences come to form who Tiera is. The meshing of such experiences foreground the very way Tiera has become the teacher she is—what she seeks to accomplish in this role, and how she understands AAL and its place in her classroom.

***Professional goals.*** The following data include Tiera’s aforementioned goal of staying local to teach, as well as her reasoning why. Chief among her reasons are personal factors—friendships, emotional ties to the local school district, academic endeavors, and membership to various organizations.

Alice: ...where do you see yourself in the future...your ideal future placement?

Tiera: ...in an elementary school in the [local] area....

Alice: so you are pretty committed to stay...in [this local town]...why is that?

Tiera: ...I love the school system...I guess I’m biased with [the local town] schools...I love them. I would like to stay in the area, period, because of the resources you get from the university, a top research school...those research

projects produce... resources and programs that ... will benefit the students and their education ...I like that element of it. And I just love the town. I've grown to just love being here. I have a group of friends that are like family. I have a church here. I'm active in the community, and I'm from [her hometown], ...I have a support system there, I just feel like it's my time to grow up and develop a name for myself while doing what I love to do, which is educating students.

In Tiera's response, we see a strong emotional tie ("love") towards the local schools. She perceives the local university as a resource to the schools that "will benefit the students and their education." In the next subsection, under Tiera's academic goals, we see more clearly how she foresees the university becoming a future resource for her. What have also helped her "love being here" are friendships that have become "like family," as well as a church and community activities she has become a part of. In this excerpt, she uses "love" as a verb to express sentiment toward her professional life, "school system," and "educating students," and also personal life, "the town" in which her "friends that are like family" reside. The overlapping sentiments between professional and personal life reflect how interconnected her reasons are for staying local. Another contributing factor Tiera has decided to remain local is that she is "active in the community." Below, Tiera further describes what this activity entails.

Alice: you said you are active in the community...in what ways would you consider yourself active in the community?

Tiera: With the church that I attend we do a lot of ...workshops, community events there...and then I just joined the ...the National Council of Negro Women...a few weeks ago, which ...they talk about issues in the community,

trying to serve people...hopefully we'll be doing a literacy program for the community soon... I sang with the [university's choir celebrating Black traditions]...there's an organization called [name of organization], where they take drug addicts off the street. They have an annual program every year that we sing for and then other community activist programs we sing for...so different programs .... mainly it's been for singing as my offering, or just being at the programs at the church, giving to the church, and giving to the community...things like that...

Many of the programs listed here revolve around service-oriented activities. The literacy program is an effort to “serve people,” as well as other events helping to meet the needs of some in the community. Whether through singing or by other means, it is important to note a theme around service-inspired work in Tiera's personal life. This theme resurfaces when exploring her teaching philosophy. We see here, though, that an impetus for Tiera to remain local is tied to the ways she can “serve” members of this community. Work around serving others transcends into Tiera's future academic goals as well.

***Academic goals.*** In a previous interview excerpt, Tiera mentioned one of her reasons to teach locally was tied to “resources and programs” from the local university, which would “benefit students and their education.” In this data, Tiera discusses some of the “resources and programs” she has in mind for her own future. Embedded within these future academic goals are those that will “benefit students and their education.”

Alice: ...you talked about the resources with the research at the [university]. do you have plans for continued education...?

Tiera: yes

Alice: can you tell me about that?

Tiera: I plan to apply to graduate school...I want to teach for a while...I'm looking into the ELL grad program that I just found out about...but one of the requirement is that you have to teach for a minimum of two or three years...but I'm looking into that ...since there are a lot of ELL students in this community, I really want to be able to serve them just as well as I can serve the students that are natives of the community...after that I plan on eventually getting my doctorate...becoming a principal.... one of my...dissertation topics ... I really wanna examine ... the achievement gap as it relates to African American children, and so even the schools that claim that are good, like on the south side of [large Midwest city], still don't compare to the good schools, quote and quote, to the north side of [large Midwest city]...looking at that achievement gap and the impact of what it...has on children...institutional racism that plays into it, and how this school gets more resources, and that school gets more resources depending on the income taxes of the...community. All those things comprise into one, if I could get a good topic for that then I will love to research that...

Tiera's plans for graduate school include enrolling into the ELL program, as well as eventually pursuing a doctorate degree. These academic goals are fueled by the purpose of serving "ELL students in this community," and examining "the achievement gap as it relates to African American children." Aforementioned personal reasons for remaining local (e.g., serving community members) overlap here with academic endeavors. Her goal of serving ELL students is an effort to offer an education to this population of students comparable to those "native" in the community. Implicit in this logic is not only

Tiera's intention to serve to all students, but that this is accomplished through the investment of her own academic knowledge. In this way, Tiera foresees her future academic life enhancing her work as a professional. Similarly, Tiera's interest in researching equity issues related to African American children benefit students by examining the "impact" and role of "institutional racism" and income-related school funding.

Throughout Tiera's professional plans and academic ambitions, we see dynamic intersections, crossing arenas of her life that make it difficult to separate one from the other. Overarching future plans and decisions are matters personal to Tiera—friendships, social groups, her community, and a mission to "serve." In some regard, what she seeks to accomplish as a teacher, is an extension and continuation of what she has already been accomplishing in her personal life. While the topic of AAL has yet to specifically addressed, Tiera's responses provide evidence of her awareness of traditionally marginalized students. In the sections that follow, I will trace Tiera's personal background as a way of understanding her views of AAL. How those views manifest in the classroom will be discussed in the next chapter.

**Meshing of experiences: Tiera's teaching philosophy.** The meshing of Tiera's various avenues of life discussed up to this point paint the complexities within how she has and plans to enact her life. Underlying her choices to remain local, pursue graduate school, and to research marginalized student populations are personal interests—friendships and social groups that work towards service in helping others. These intersections and meshing to the point of being unable to separate one part from another, help us see how *all* areas of her life come to form Tiera as a whole. It is Tiera, as a whole,

informed by the accumulation of a variety of experiences, that decides how she will live her life. The previous sections set a backdrop for some of Tiera's background, and help us gain a sense of what she cares about and her intentions as a teacher. This section further probes into Tiera's teaching philosophy, not as a set of compartmentalized beliefs tucked away in her "professional life," but as a lived expression comprised of the experiences along her life journey. Consideration for this journey, as we begin to conceive of Tiera as a teacher, is the bedrock for understanding her as an embodied toolkit.

My point of departure is the identification of Tiera's teaching philosophy, as I have interpreted it, based on recurring themes that surface across varied life experiences. Service in helping others, a theme from the previous section, is again discussed here, to further delineate its role within the context of her teaching philosophy. Data are organized to guide readers, first through her personal life and past background, and then into how ideas from those experiences mesh with notions she has for her classroom. I begin with data that was part of the conversation (during our initial interview) Tiera and I had about her ideal future placement. After informing me of her decision to stay in local school districts, she includes a statement that I have identified as Tiera's teaching philosophy.

Alice: ...where do you see yourself in the future...your ideal future placement?

Tiera: ...in an elementary school in the [local] area...just serving children and educating them...realizing that success comes at different levels...as long as my child is performing to the best of their ability, then I should be satisfied with



that...and continue to push them, but don't push them where it's no longer effective and where it's more detrimental than effective.

I identify this as Tiera's teaching philosophy because key ideas in this statement recur in ideas she has articulated for the classroom, and again appear in my observations of her pedagogy (detailed in chapter six). These ideas are: 1) service to others, 2) balancing a "push" to foster one's "best" and care for that person, in a way that does not 3) shut a child down. In Tiera's statement, she links "serving children" and "educating them" together. In examples that follow, we will see the linkage of how educating students functions as a way she serves them. Another key tenant to Tiera's teaching philosophy is the idea of "push[ing]" students to perform "to the best of their ability," in a way that is not "more detrimental than effective." In this section, I will link how her past experiences of receiving correction at home helped shape her definition of pushing students, as it relates to AAL in the classroom. Through my data, I will also show how she believes that a teacher's care and intentions are significant in balancing out this "push" towards students' "best." Without such a balance, students may be "push[ed]" to a point "where it's more detrimental than effective," and in Tiera's words, "shut down." I will explore data that helps us understand, from Tiera's perspective, how she constructs the idea of a child "shut[ting] down." A main purpose in discussing key concepts in Tiera's philosophy as a teacher is to show that these ideas do not magically materialize. They are infused and constructed out of experiences from her family upbringing and past academic experiences. And, it is from this accumulated knowledge, that Tiera enacts her lived philosophy as a teacher.

***Service in Tiera's personal life.*** As previously discussed, service was a theme that characterized much of the activities and social groups Tiera shared about in her personal life. Under the section about Tiera's professional goals, I included data in which Tiera listed various outlets of her activity in the community. In that excerpt, she included a local branch of the national organization, National Council of Negro Women Inc., which "serve[s] people" through planning a "literacy program" for community members. Tiera also talked about being a member of a university choir celebrating African American traditions, in which she sang in an event for a local organization helping drug addicts. In recalling the various events in which she had sung, Tiera described "singing as my offering," which she linked to "giving to the church" and also "giving to the community." Through these examples, we see service to others through programs that provide educative skills or aid in some way as a theme in Tiera's personal life. For her, singing is a large outlet of service to her community. This theme of service also transfers to her professional life.

***Service as a teacher.*** Tiera also mentioned her intentions for graduate school included her "serv[ing]" her students as well. She talked about wanting to enter an "ELL grad program" because of the "ELL students in this community," and the ability to "serve them just as well as I can serve the students that are native of the community." In the previous section, I highlighted this data to show the intersection of her professional and academic goals. Here, I reiterate this data to point out how service is a key tenet for Tiera's teaching philosophy. As stated in the first data excerpt in this section, what I deemed Tiera's teaching philosophy, Tiera discusses what is important in staying local—

“serving children and educating them.” Within the context of her classroom, educating a diverse body of students is Tiera’s outlet of service.

Tiera is also concerned with “serv[ing] the students that are native of the community.” While the term “native” includes a broad array of people, Tiera has a specific population in mind. She alludes to this population when she discusses what she wants to research as a future doctoral student. She shares her interest in “the achievement gap as it relates to African American children,” issues of “institutional racism” and inequitable funding in schools. Even though Tiera does not specifically use the word, “serve” when talking about future dissertation topics, these research interests revolve around students marginalized by race and class. In this instance, her service towards these students, and possibly society at large, is her investigation of the treatment of such populations. Serving marginalized students appears in another part of our interview when I asked her about her student teaching placement. Being placed in a self-contained, district-identified “gifted” classroom, Tiera initially had concerns about teaching in such an environment, nervous that she would not be “fulfilling my goals.” She shares about what these goals were:

Tiera: ... at first I thought I was being disadvantaged because I really want to teach those students of a low performing rate or low-income students and so I felt being in the gifted program, I wasn’t really fulfilling my goals or reaching the goal I set for myself. Because they still need something, they may not have a high need like other students.

Her goal, as stated by Tiera, was “to teach those students of a low performing rate or low-income students.” Implicit in her goal is a view that places “low-income” as being

mutually exclusive to being “gifted” or being enrolled in that program. Still, we see that Tiera is again concerned with populations marginalized in schools. Within the context of this conversation, Tiera talked about her later satisfaction in her current placement, once she realized that students in her “gifted” classroom “still need[ed] something.” Tiera’s rationale for eventual approval of her placement was that students in that class still had “need.” Based on this logic, Tiera’s feeling “disadvantaged” by this placement was, in part, due to the lack of “need” among a “gifted” population of students, vis-à-vis “students of a low performing rate or low-income,” who would have “a high need.” Thus, we see that one way Tiera accomplishes “serving children and educating them,” is by teaching marginalized populations of students. In the next two subsections, we further explore other tenets of her teaching philosophy through data about her upbringing.

***Family background.*** Another key concept Tiera returns to when talking about various experiences from her upbringing comes from her statement, “as long as my child is performing to the best of their ability, then I should be satisfied with that...and continue to push them, but don’t push them where it’s no longer effective and where it’s more detrimental than effective.” Underlying this notion of “push[ing]” students to perform “to the best of their ability,” in a way that is not “more detrimental than effective,” is the idea that one must be “pushed” in order to achieve one’s “best.” The “push,” however, must be balanced, so as not to be “more detrimental than effective.” In examples that follow, I link Tiera’s idea of being “pushed” to data in which she talks about being corrected for AAL-use and having a “standard” that was “set” for her. These “pushes” were balanced with verbal affirmation of her parents’ love and care.

In the following excerpt, I inquired into her mother's correction of AAL-use, and how Tiera responded to such correction.

Alice: ...I remember you saying your mom would correct you... and your dad did not as much, but...you took it well from your mother...can you talk a little about that again? ...

Tiera: I took it well because ... it would be like in a playful way, like we would say ... “ya’ll ain’t comin’ to the store wit us”... or we’ll say “you’d be trippin’” or something like that. She’ll say, “you can never be” or “what is ya’ll” or something ...to correct us in that way. ...I think the reason why I never saw it as anything that was bad, because around that time...much research about AAVE didn’t exist, and so it wasn’t much support to say that AAVE was a real language and so I just, I didn’t feel any type of way...I didn’t feel like she was downplaying my language, because at the time it wasn’t a language, to me it was just ...slang-type lazy situation. ... Parents back then didn’t know the entire role that AAVE played and how significant it is to expressing their culture, their beliefs...so I didn’t really see it...detrimental to my growth ...

From this data, Tiera provides examples of the ways her mother corrected her AAL-use. Part of the reason she “took it well,” from Tiera’s mind, is that her mother corrected “in a playful way,” in comparison to a more direct approach that perhaps may have caused Tiera feel as though the correction was “detrimental to my growth.” Tiera’s reasoning here for not interpreting the correction as “anything that was bad” was the lack of research and her parents’ knowledge about the linguistic legitimacy behind AAL at that time. This reasoning is somewhat circular since Tiera, like the rest of society, would not

have known “how significant” AAL is in “culture.” Therefore, it would not be feasible for Tiera to know that “research about AAVE didn’t exist,” and thus, unlikely for this reason to help her not feel “bad” about her mother’s correction. Instead, I interpret her mother’s correction as not being “detrimental” to Tiera’s “growth,” because of the “playful” approach her mother has on correcting AAL-use. Later, in the subsection about how Tiera’s teaching philosophy is played out in her ideas for the classroom, we see data that confirms this idea that a person’s approach in correction matters; it can either help “push” the child, or be “detrimental” in “growth.”

The next data excerpt comes from a point in the interview in which Tiera discussed how she was “representing” her mother whenever she “step[ped] out of the house.” Tiera explained that due to the close relationship her parents had with school faculty, as well as the proximity of her house to the school, she was very careful about her behavior in school. Implicit in her parents’ expectations of Tiera is a “push” toward a “standard” that was “set” for her.

Tiera: ...I would’ve been the fool to misbehave or to act out or to disrespect someone...it was mainly the way we were raised and we knew the standard that was set before us. And we knew that we had to meet it. And if we didn’t meet it, then we had consequences...the main thing...the difference between now and then is that I know a lot of children that I mentor...when they mess up, they still get rewarded. And so they don’t see why we shouldn’t behave this way, because after I disrespect the teacher then I still get to go and hang out with my friends. Part of her parents’ “push” for Tiera was helping her know she “had consequences” if “the standard that was set before” her was not met. Their “push,” then, helped her not

“misbehave,” be a “fool,” of “disrespect someone.” Tiera juxtaposes her upbringing to students she currently mentors, as they still “get rewarded” even when “they mess up.” By her logic, they continue to “behave this way” and “disrespect the teacher,” because they are not being “pushed” to behave differently. The “push” to be Tiera’s “best,” in this instance, is the tacit correction of her behavior through setting a “standard” with “consequences” when the “standard” is not met.

Her parents’ “push,” through “playful” or implied correction, was balanced with care. During the interview, Tiera shared various experiences being corrected for her AAL-use in school. I asked her if receiving that correction had a negative impact on her. Below, in her response to this inquiry, we see Tiera’s clarity in her parents’ care for her.

Tiera: ...I think that’s mainly because of my nurturing environment at home, and so I had a very strong support system. I had both of my parents. They told me that they loved me every day, that I was beautiful...receive a high education ...they stated my goals to where that was internally ...deposited in me...subconscious or consciously, I just knew that I was gonna go to high school, go to college...find my career and do well. So just having that background ...it just ...created...this means of ...comfort...the support system that a lot of children don’t have. So if you’re not hearing encouraging words at home and then when you go to school all you hear are words of correction and then you go home seeking comforting words but you don’t get it...it’s all intertwined ...it just... creates... a mess. ... if I got corrected at school, then I’ll come home and receive that love again, then I knew that, okay, I’m just gonna get better....I think the home and the school plays...an important role ...in educational development.

Her parents' care came through a "nurturing environment at home" that provided for her a "very strong support system." These were made evident through daily verbal affirmation of their "love," and message that she was "beautiful." Tiera has tied this nurture and support with her parents' "goals" that were "deposited" in her. Their goals included "receiv[ing] a high education," which entailed finishing high school, "go[ing] to college," attaining a "career," and "do[ing] well." We, again, see hints of their "push" for Tiera's "best" by setting future academic and professional "goals" for her. It is notable that both her parents' care and "push" are included in Tiera's description of a "nurturing environment" and "strong support system." The inclusion of both elements is indicative, again, of the balance between "push" and care present in Tiera's teaching philosophy.

***Past academic experiences.*** Key concepts from Tiera's teaching philosophy can also be seen in her past academic experiences. Through her explanation of former teachers, I provide data that can be interpreted as them "pushing," Tiera towards her "best," but not in a way that is "more detrimental than effective." Within the context of Tiera's response, I link their "push" towards their correction of her AAL-use. She also explains how she understood their intentions for her, as well as how she knows their correction was not "more detrimental than effective." Tiera's response below comes from a part of the interview in which we had talked about the Wheeler excerpt, and as a native AAL-speaker, I wondered if she had any experiences related to the article.

Tiera: ... the way I was taught is so different than the way children are taught now...it was so traditional, and so I feel like the teachers that I have didn't have any ill-meaning towards...ill-intentions to...make me not participate or to make me not just shut down, but their goal was to educate me and make sure that when



I went into the world I didn't sound like a fool by speaking ...a language that at that time was not accepted at all. Like right now, people don't really accept it that much, but back then...it was no acceptance. And so, I had teachers that corrected me...I knew better than to write... in AAVE, because it was just a ... code-switching thing. You just know, when you write it's time to use the academic language...when you speak, then you can be relaxed. But even in the classroom I never...used AAVE like that unless I was talking to my friend. And then sometimes...if I was talking to my teacher, it would slip out, but I really don't have a pinpoint experience where...I can say "oh yeah, they did that and I felt some way about it."

As Tiera interprets it, her teachers' "goal" for her was to "educate" her and prepare her for "the world" by helping her not "sound like a fool" through AAL-usage. Their "goal" for Tiera to be "educated" and "sound" a certain way, given Tiera's premise that they were not "ill-meaning" and it was "back then," can be interpreted as them trying to help her be the "best" of her "ability." While the teachers' practices and intentions are debatable, this interpretation is based on how I read Tiera's explanation of her past. If her "best" would be making her "sound" a certain way, then the "push" to fostering this "best" would be through their correction. And, as Tiera said, their correction played a part in her writing in AAL, as well as knowing what circumstances she needed to "code-switch." Their "push" through correction of her language, however, was not "more detrimental than effective." Implied in Tiera's comment that she was unable to remember a "pinpoint experience" that made her feel "some way about it," is that if their correction had been "detrimental," she would have had some recollection of the situation.

She stated this more directly in a previous data excerpt (p. 100), under the subsection of Tiera becoming bidialectal. In talking about her teachers' correction of her AAL-use, Tiera said, "it must not have been that important if I can't remember it...if it was something that was painful, or something that ... really made me ponder about my entire existence of why am I even in school, then I would've remembered that." In this statement, Tiera confirms my assertion above, which is that their correction "must not have been that important" or "painful" if she is unable to remember a "pinpoint experience." In a continuation of Tiera's response above, she reiterates her understanding of her teachers' intentions, and begins to then discuss how she envisions this balance between care and correction in the classroom.

Tiera: ... 'Cause for the most part, I knew the intentions of my teachers, and that's another thing...as a teacher you have to make sure that your children know that you care. And so when you do chastise them or correct them or ... make them sit out for recess because they didn't do their homework, that they know ...okay, I'm mad right now but my teacher cares, and the next moment, they'll be okay. But if they don't know that then they'll just think everything that you're doing as a bashing of their entire being in the classroom. ... I don't have a real pinpoint moment where it's just like "oh they're completely against my language" and they made me feel some type of way.

Here Tiera reiterates the fact that she could not recall a "real pinpoint moment" that made her feel as though her teachers were "completely against my language" and "made me feel some type of way." Tiera also links knowing "the intentions of my teachers" to her belief that "as a teacher you have to make sure that your children know that you care."

This linkage suggests that Tiera interprets her teachers' intentions were those of "care" for her, which is consistent with her previous description of her teachers as not "ill-meaning" or "ill-intention[ed]." She explicates the idea of balancing care and correction, the way she envisions it in a classroom scenario. From Tiera's perspective, a teacher is able to "chastise" or "correct" a student by enforcing a consequence for a given standard ("do their homework"), if the student knows "my teacher cares." However, Tiera reasons that "if they don't know" of the teacher's care, then students will interpret correction "as a bashing of their entire being." Within a classroom context, we see a balance between correction and care in Tiera's reasoning, and that care being a basis for helping the child "be okay" and not feeling "bash[ed]" (i.e., not being "pushed" to "where it is more detrimental than effective"). This classroom scenario, as played out in Tiera's thoughts, is consistent with elements of Tiera's teaching philosophy, which have been discussed in detail in the last two subsections. The overlapping ideologies between this scenario and ideas garnered from her family upbringing and past academic experiences continue to resonate in ideas Tiera has for her classroom.

***Ideas for the classroom.*** Under previous subsections discussing service as a theme in both her personal life and work with students, we see how ideology from one area of her life can mesh into another. This meshing is indicative that Tiera functions as a whole, not from a compartmentalized set of beliefs. Her experiences discussed up to this point are a way to draw connections between themes/ideas from her past and ideologies that show up now, in her teaching philosophy, and ideas for her classroom. As seen from the last data excerpt, Tiera's experiences from home and at school helped shape notions of balancing correction and care, and "pushing" Tiera towards her "best."

The examples in this subsection further explore how she understands “pushing” students in a way that is not “more detrimental than effective.” The excerpt below comes from a part of the interview in which I asked Tiera what she thought of the Wheeler excerpt.

Tiera: ...it can automatically shut a child down, especially if they already have thoughts that their language is not sufficient, ...their language is not enough, or they already have people...saying that they don’t know how to speak. ...it’s not so much a blatant statement of “oh, you don’t know how to speak” but the different looks that you get or the different statements you say on the side, children pick that up. And so for you to say something like this, immediately it could serve as a way to shut someone down or it could serve as a way to bruise someone up ... when you asked how would I respond to this question, I would just tell him what we would be doing for math in the afternoon, because the language has nothing to do with whether he’s gonna comprehend the math or not. Like if the math lesson is talking about multiplication, then regardless if he changes his sentence structure, the math lesson is still going to be multiplication. So why should I deter him or make him get mad before I even introduce the lesson?

Tiera describes correcting a child’s usage of AAL as something that can “automatically shut a child down.” She alludes to prevalent sociopolitical deficit views of the dialect when she says mentions how students may “already have thoughts that their language is not sufficient” or “they don’t know how to speak.” Instead, she offers an alternative response to the child in the Wheeler article—simply answering the boy’s question. Based on Tiera’s understanding, while the math content and the boy’s language are separate entities, correcting his speech “before I even introduce the lesson” can “deter him” from

learning the math content. In this instance, correcting his language would be a way of “pushing” the student in a way that is “more detrimental than effective.” Tiera takes this notion of “shut [ting] a child down,” and extends it to her current student teaching placement.

Tiera: ...Because I have a lot of kids in my classroom where I’m learning to do certain things. Like one of my children... if you put him out on the spot, like if we’re on the carpet and you’re talking, I see him talking, I’ll give him a look and he’ll cool down. But if I were to say, “Alice, stop talking” then he’ll immediately shut down, like [using kid’s voice] “what did I do?”, and for the rest of the lesson he will not participate. And so now what I do is...we’ve been doing a couple of math lessons ... in teacher voice] “okay class, we’re going to work independently and I’m gonna give you a few minutes to work, and while we work just think about these steps on the board” and while people are doing things independently, I’ll say, “I’m gonna come around to check to make sure you’re on the right track and as I’m coming around, *then* that’s when I speak to him. And then he doesn’t feel like it’s so personal because...these other 14 students are looking at me. ... I don’t know if the teacher [from Wheeler article] knew the entire makeup of the child or what...could shut him down...

Tiera provides an example of a boy in her current classroom that will “shut down,” if she “put[s] him out on the spot,” by explicitly addressing his behavior in front of the rest of the class. Correcting his behavior in front of his peers could be considered “pushing” him in a way that is “more detrimental than effective,” since he would no longer participate in the lesson. Tiera offers, instead, two counter examples that would “push”

the student through correction, but in a way that does not make him “shut down.” The first example Tiera provides is by simply giving him “a look” that will cause him to “cool down.” As told by Tiera, the boy understands that the “look” signifies correction and it is “effective” because the student will “cool down,” versus asking, “what did I do?” and shutting down. The second example entails waiting to correct the boy after the class has dispersed to work independently. Again, addressing his behavior still “pushes” him, but does not cause him to shut down because, as Tiera interprets it, he “doesn’t feel like it’s so personal.” The methods Tiera described are classroom practices that are congruent to the notion of “pushing” (e.g., indirect correction that is not “on the spot”) a student in a way that is not “more detrimental than effective” (i.e., shutting down a child). This notion, along with fostering the “best” in a student, with a view of teaching as service, recur across Tiera’s family upbringing, past academic experiences, and participation in various social groups. It is little surprise, then, that these very notions also appear in Tiera’s ideologies of teaching, and what I have identified as her teaching philosophy. The meshing of ideas from Tiera’s personal experiences (past and current) and how they shape her professional decisions reinforces the view of Tiera as a whole. Understanding her in this light, Tiera functions from her accumulated knowledge, and not from segmented “parts” of knowledge confined to a particular area of life. Tiera’s accumulated knowledge not only gives breath to her philosophy as a teacher, but also her view of AAL.

**Meshing of experiences: view of African American Language.** Data from Tiera’s past experiences map events marking her linguistic landscape. Parents, teachers, friends, and community members all played a role in Tiera’s life, in varied contexts,

helping to construct who she is. Previous sections familiarized us with her linguistic repertoire, and how the journey in becoming a code-switcher contributed to many of her ideologies as a teacher. This journey, in similar ways, has also facilitated Tiera's construction of AAL, and its role in her classroom. In this section, I retrace how some of the same actors who had a part in forming who Tiera is, again appear as those who help shape her view about her language. Also included here are ideas from a college required language course and their contribution to her accumulated knowledge. Given the historically devalued status of the dialect, however, we also see Tiera negotiate the use of her own native tongue within persistent deficit views of the language in society. Such interaction yields a complex view of AAL, as will be shown in examples that follow.

***(Mis)representation of her mother.*** One key concept from Tiera's teaching philosophy was the idea of a balanced "push" that foster one's "best" without "shutting down" the child. Data from the subsection on Tiera's family background presented strands of this idea. In the excerpt that discussed her parents' "standard" that was "set before" Tiera in school, I contextualized the data with information regarding the close nature of her parents' relationship with school faculty. As a result of their relationship, Tiera talked about being cautious of her behavior in school. In the data below, she explains how both her behavior and language were linked to representing her parents.

Tiera: ... my parents knew the principal and the staff well from over the years, so I knew that they already developed this relationship and I would be a fool if I came to the school and misrepresented them. ... With me, ... I knew not to disrespect the teacher, because I knew that if I had disrespected the teacher, it didn't matter if my mother had...plans...two months ago a big birthday

celebration, it would've been cancelled, because I misrepresented to her. And so that has to go with the language as well, not as strict for the language, like if I slipped up and said "you be" or "ya'll" then I wouldn't have been on punishment but it ...goes along with that representation...along with my behavior. I knew my behavior was representing them, I knew my language was representing them. I knew how I dressed represented them, how ...everything represented how I was raised at home...

The idea of representation/misrepresentation is strongly conveyed in Tiera's description of her behavior at school, her AAL-use in public spaces, and even "how I dressed." It is her misbehavior ("disrespect the teacher"), however, that is compared to AAL-usage, and thus casts AAL in a negative light. Tiera parallels having a birthday party being taken away for "misrepresent[ing]" behavior to "slip[ping] up" and saying "you be or "ya'll." While she would not be on "punishment" for such language, the insinuation is that Tiera would be representing them in a poor light, based on her parents' standards, by the use of AAL. Also, her lack of decorous behavior and what it represents about parenting is more of consequence vis-à-vis AAL. Representation, for Tiera, spanned beyond her family and toward her racial community as well.

***Representation of her racial community.*** We see that Tiera also interprets her AAL-use as being representative of other African Americans, a racial group she identifies with. The excerpt below is part of a larger response Tiera had when I asked about her learning in her college required language course. In recounting what she had learned about AAL, Tiera included how societal perceptions influenced her use of the dialect.



Tiera: ...And I know to this day if I go into...a meeting and I'm just talking...using my complete AAVE language, it's just, wouldn't be a good look for me, 'cause I'm still representing my family, and I'm representing a lot of, because sometimes...I may be the only African American that you see. And so ... since I'm the only African American that you see, then you're gonna take what I do and place it on the entire African American people. And so I have to make sure that what I do is a good representation of the African American people, because whether I do right or wrong, you're still gonna think that this is how all African Americans behave. And so my language has a big part...in that. I have to make sure my language is up to par, when I'm speaking.

Tiera describes her use of AAL in public spaces, like “a meeting,” as not being a “good look.” Her reasoning is not only because she is “still representing my family,” but “the entire African American people,” especially if those hearing her have limited interactions with other African Americans. From Tiera's perspective, using language that is “up to par” in public spaces is “a big part” of providing “good representation of the African American people.” From this data excerpt and the one above, it appears, based on Tiera's comments, that she holds deficit views about the dialect. Her linkage of AAL-use to misbehavior, misrepresentation of her family/racial community, and even considering the dialect as not being “up to par,” all shine AAL through a deficit lens. However, as the following data presents, Tiera's understanding of her native tongue is complex.

***“Speak a certain way in certain situations”.*** Data from the last two subsections have presented Tiera as viewing AAL as speech that is not “up to par.” In the following subsections, I provide data contrasting simplistic conclusions of Tiera's views. After

learning about both her parents' and teachers' correction of Tiera's usage of AAL, I wondered how such correction affected her own perceptions of the dialect. Her response helps us interpret her view of AAL as a response to deficit views found in society at large.

Tiera: I was always secure in my language...I never felt like AAVE was a bad thing, I just knew when and when not to speak it. I knew it wasn't valued by the larger society but that didn't lessen my value of it. I just knew that you just don't go speaking like that ...in the office or when you go for an interview. That's just not a language that you...use. So it didn't really have...a negative impact on me. I think the main thing is since I was getting corrected at home and had teachers that possibly corrected periodically, it just taught me how to code-switch.

Opposite to what could be ascertained from previous data, Tiera "never" viewed AAL as "a bad thing." The fear of (mis)representation of her family/community with AAL-use must be juxtaposed to her awareness that "it wasn't valued by the larger society." Tiera's articulation that socially deficit views of AAL "didn't lessen my value of it," reaffirms an interpretation that societal perceptions are within her purview. Her views of appropriate representation, then, must be understood within socially sanctioned times/places of "when and when not to speak" AAL. As the conversation from above ensues, we see that her ability to discern when to speak AAL is also learned through her social context.

Alice: ...do you think ... it's through your mother's correction, your teacher's correction that you became a code-switcher?

Tiera: ... some things I just knew, maybe just in my household...in my community, you just know...the same way you ...know...I know if an elder comes into the room, I get up so they can take my seat, especially if there's no

seats left. Or like how men should know ...typically back then, if there's a woman walking through the door, you know to open the door. I knew to speak a certain way in certain situations. And so, I don't know how I began to know, maybe all of those things played a role in it, but I just knew, that when you get to this certain place, you speak correctly, at the time that was the correct way to speak. And mainly because I was representing my mother...when I step out of the house, I'm a representation of that household and so if I misbehaved then I'm saying something about my household and I'm giving out a message I know my mother would not be pleased with me to give out. ...I just knew certain things and ... it was due to the way I was raised, I just knew.

Alice: ...it sounds like what you knew was that there were certain ways to speak at certain places...were those explicitly from your mother?

Tiera: I don't think so...it was a picked up thing...every day thing that ...just grew on you

Here Tiera mentions how her “household” and “community” also “played a role” in teaching her “to speak a certain way in certain situations.” Given the multiple times Tiera talked about her mother, as it related to AAL, it is notable that her awareness of “appropriate” AAL-use is what she describes as “a picked up thing” that “just grew on you.” Tiera’s communicative competence reminds us of the socializing nature of language acquisition. The issue of family representation, again, reappears as Tiera is mindful of “the correct way to speak” when she “step[s] out of the house.” Her ideas of what is and is not “correct” are tied to the sociopolitical stigma around language at a historical point in time, and not a reflection of her “value” of the dialect.

***Required language course.*** As part of Tiera's elementary education program, she completed a required language course, discussing dialects of English, particularly AAL, and bilingual methods. A portion of the interview focused on what she learned in the course, as it related to AAL. The two examples below are excerpts from this portion of our conversation. Much of the conversation also revolved around applications of what she learned from this course in her classroom. Those data will be presented in the next chapter. Tiera's response here shares new understanding of the dialect's linguistic legitimacy.

Tiera: ...it was the first time that I learned that it was a real language, meaning where I had the research to back up the theory that it was a language. Over time I knew it was a language 'cause we spoke it, but it was just very interesting to see how the educational system or at least people that believe in...incorporating the diverse needs of the students into the classroom... it was interesting to see how we've come to a place to where we're looking at how language affects the learning, and how accepting one's language can really produce benefits...academic benefits

While this course was "the first time" Tiera learned that AAL was a "real language," she qualifies this statement to say that it was the first time "research" was able to "back up" its legitimacy. Her statement that she had known it was a language "over time" because "we spoke it," suggests that its "value" was in its function as a form of communication within her own household and community. What is "interesting" to her is the acknowledgement and acceptance from "the educational system" that once corrected such language. Her position in distinguishing what she had known was "a language" because

of what existed at home and its “educational” acceptance now as a “real language,” is consistent with previous assertions about Tiera’s value of her native tongue. The data below suggests that her view of AAL has remained constant.

Alice: do you think your perception of AAVE changed through the class?

Tiera: (pause) I don’t think my perception changed, I think that ... I guess it changed a little bit in the fact that I’m more willing to let my students speak AAVE in class. But that’s the only way I think it changed—how I’m willing to allow them to express their ideas in AAVE but then educate them enough to know that there’s a certain time to use AAVE and there’s a certain time to use the academic language.

In her response, there is no mention of the theoretical backings of AAL shifting her “perception” of the dialect, which is congruent with the previous excerpt that implies her value of the dialect, simply because it was spoken at home. Tiera identifies her change in being “more willing to let my students speak AAVE in class.” The purpose of this shift, as Tiera states, is so students can “express their ideas.” This theme of accepting linguistic diversity in the classroom, as integral to learning, will be more thoroughly explored in the next chapter. Here, however, she stipulates parameters for AAL-use. Those are: for education purposes, and so students become aware that “there’s a certain time to use AAVE and there’s a certain time to use the academic language.” These parameters harken back to aforementioned assertions made about Tiera’s views of AAL. That is, that Tiera has valued AAL all along, and that her seemingly deficit views are a response and understanding of real deficit views that persist in society. Her understanding of AAL, regarding her own usage and its role in the classroom, has been

shaped by those in her life, during a historically situated time. Her complex, and seemingly contradictory, views of the dialect stem from negotiating her native tongue within societal structures, who themselves, have shifted over time.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter provided in-depth exploration of both Raniya and Tiera, and the multi-faceted experiences forming their unique accumulated knowledge. Such knowledge is a collection of the events experienced with the varied people along their life's ways. For Raniya, the events she shared with me consisted of those mostly occurring in academic and professional settings. The data presented from her case show an intermixing, and reciprocal flow of ideas that transcended one area of her life to the other. The meshing of such learning builds my assertion that a teacher's knowledge cannot be dissected, nor limited to one part of a person's life. To understand a teacher's knowledge is to understand the teacher. Honoring teachers' experiences, often ones from devalued or forgotten avenues, offer critical ways of connecting what they know to what they will do in the classroom. This is especially evident as we consider Tiera, her complex linguistic journey in becoming a code-switcher, and how her personal experiences have shaped her teaching philosophy and views of AAL. The knowledge featured here through the dynamic interplay of Raniya and Tiera's various experiences set the stage for how we will understand them, in the next chapter, as embodied toolkits.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **EMBODIED TOOLKITS: THE PERSONIFICATION OF TEACHER**

#### **ACCUMULATED KNOWLEDGE**

In my quest to examine teacher knowledge about African American Language, I found both similarities and differences among my three cases regarding this topic. In chapter five, I documented their similarities—an overall understanding of linguistic features, as well as the dialect’s historical and sociopolitical context. However, teachers placed emphasis on varying aspects of language diversity, based on their varied lived experiences. All of these experiences shaped and molded teachers’ understandings about language, which did not sit as static pieces of knowledge, but something teachers linked to their classrooms. This notion that the source of a teacher’s pedagogy is found within the self, not solely dependent on an outside source, describes a view of the teacher as an embodied toolkit. Previously, I demonstrated how different understandings about language diversity were interwoven from their varied life and professional experiences, to form their accumulated knowledge. In this chapter, I investigate how each case enacts her knowledge of language as embodied toolkits.

#### **Sara as an Embodied Toolkit**

Of the varied life experiences Sara shared with me, themes around what she knew took shape as I considered not only the meshing of different areas of her life, but what that meshing said about her. Partnership with the local university offered her new experiences as a research participant, graduate student, and teaching assistant that provided avenues of growth academically, socially, personally, and professionally. Her growth in these areas is mutually embedded into who she is, as a person, and as a teacher.

From chapter four, we learned that Sara had sociocultural understandings about language, as well as knowledge about bilingual methodology. Friendships and family relationships provided opportunities for Sara to construct language and culture as integrally tied to who we are and the people we love. Based on the glimpses of accumulated knowledge we have learned about Sara, this section is devoted to understanding how Sara breathes life into such knowledge, as an embodied toolkit. In particular, I focus on how Sara enacts her knowledge of language and bilingual methods into her curriculum and instruction, and also how her view of language and culture as integral to identity influenced her pedagogical decision-making.

**Knowledge of language and bilingual methods.** Data presented from my initial interview with Sara showed her sociopolitical awareness of AAL as devalued language, particularly in academic settings. Her view of AAL, however, contrasted with that of her colleagues. Twice, Sara had mentioned that, linguistically, a language and dialect functioned similarly. This accurate view of language, with a language and dialect not as separate categories, but relative to each other, played a role in the type of units she planned for her students. During a follow-up interview, Sara explained that while she saw “nuances” in different languages, the “big idea” was the same: people all have a “mother tongue” with which they speak, some are discriminated for the use of theirs, while others are not. Sara said that she perceived “language discrimination” as an “umbrella” issue over both AAL and ELL speakers.

***Language discrimination unit.*** With a class comprised of Spanish, Chinese, French, and AAL speakers, Sara taught a unit on “language discrimination” for the entire class. This unit was taught during the semester after I left (in Spring 2015), because the



units I observed (in Fall 2014) served as a way to build up to the unit on language discrimination. In the next subsection, I more fully detail the primary unit I observed, which included issues of institutional racism and white privilege, and laid the groundwork for units in the spring 2015 semester. Sara, however, recounted aspects of this unit with me during a follow-up interview. She informed me that she drew on the PBS curriculum “Do you speak American?” to discuss the varied ways Americans speak, and also how language discrimination is institutionalized. Sara used resources like Amy Tan’s (1990) “Mother Tongue,” and a video clip showing language discrimination within the housing market. One activity in the unit Sara recalled was having students translate a poem into “academic English,” “old English,” “AAVE,” “Chinglish,” “Spanglish,” and “emojis.” Sara told me that one of the ideas she wanted her students to learn from this unit was that knowing multiple ways of speaking, including their “family language,” was an “asset.” In this unit, Sara enacts her knowledge about varieties of English, their sociopolitical positionalities, and view that language and culture are important because of *and* as a result of their origin within the family. She exercises discernment about what curricula she chose to draw from, what big ideas she wants students to walk away with, and the resources/activities to accomplish this goal. Her fluid view of language also played a role in her approach of incorporating bilingual methods into the class.

***Bilingual methods.*** Throughout my classroom observations of Sara, I noticed her incorporation of various bilingual methods that she alluded to in our initial interview. These included scaffolding academic vocabulary, using visuals, and using multimodal techniques.

*“Menu of scaffolds”*. I wondered what role Sara’s fluid view of language and dialect played in her decision to use bilingual methods for all students. Were they strategies targeted towards her ELL students, but practices the entire class, by default, were included in? Did she perceive these methods to be “good” for all students, and thus, incorporated them for everyone? In a follow-up interview, I probed deeper into her thinking about the use of bilingual methods, and what populations of students she had in mind when planning the use of such strategies. In talking about for whom her bilingual methods were:

Sara: ...[pause] I’m not gonna mush it all to the point where it’s like, “oh, just good teaching is good for everyone.” ... ‘Cause it wasn’t just that. ... It’s also ...whatever scaffolds are in place ...sometimes they’re gonna work for some kids versus other kids ...it was more like “here are the scaffolds, but I’m also doing some other things in that same class... it’s also the scaffolds are in place for [pause] all of the students as they need them. So if ...the scaffold’s getting in the way of what a kid’s doing, if a kid would prefer to say, write, without scaffolds ...or they found ...another way to approach a close reading, I needed to be flexible enough to do that. So if I could give them kinda like a menu of scaffolds, and then they could take ... those. So for some kids the scaffold of student-to-student talk ...is so crucial. ...and that translated across AAVE speakers and ESL speakers. ...opportunity for student-to-student talk, where another student might prefer to journal first before he or she speaks. So I think it was more about trying to differentiate for this population. ‘Cause on paper that class was very complex...it was very complex... there were so many kids with IEPs and 504s in

addition...but it didn't play out that way. ...it took some thought...but it wasn't... they were so invested and did such a nice job ...that...it was just a matter of finding the right, tweaking it along the way.

We see that Sara is neither applying bilingual methods solely for the benefit of a particular population, nor is she broadly applying them for “everyone” either. Instead, she draws on her knowledge of bilingual methods to create a “menu of scaffolds” used to “differentiate” for a class of students with a variety of needs. She exercised flexibility by providing various choices for ways students could participate. Like her fluid view of language, and those who spoke in varied ways, Sara provided fluid activities that accommodated varied students. This was evident in the choices she provided for various activities. For example, Sara would periodically allow time for independent writing, and would provide several prompts from which students could respond. The data below is a fieldnote excerpt from my first day of observations in Sara's classroom. As was the routine, students independently read for the first twenty minutes of class, and then Sara moved into a whole class lesson providing background information for the story, “The Scarlet Ibis” (Hurst, 1960).

Student seats are organized in six rows, three rows against one wall, and three rows against the opposite wall, so that students are facing each other. There is one large aisle in the middle of the room, where Sara places her LCD projector and laptop. After projecting images of background information for the story they will read, “The Scarlet Ibis,” Sara clicks to a new slide, which has several writing prompts students can choose from. She gives them five minutes to select one prompt to respond to and write independently. She also tells them they have the

option for “free writing” if they feel as though they cannot respond to any of the prompts. (fieldnote, September 9, 2014)

By providing several writing prompts, and also the option of free writing, Sara gives choices to a variety of students, and allows students to select learning options that suit their needs. It was also a common practice for Sara to structure activities, as she alluded to above, for students to choose whom they wanted to work with, or whether they wanted to work with anyone at all. During a unit in which the class read *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Sara selected instructional handouts to use in guiding students through close readings of the text.

Sara points students to the “Ch. 9 Close Reading” handout. As she reads the text aloud to the whole class, she shares her thinking as she models how to annotate the text. She is underlining parts of the text and writing notes on the side. Sara then moves on to model for students how to write a claim about the character Scout. The claim is about how Scout’s identity is impacted by her family. This mini-lesson lasts for about ten minutes. Students are about to go on break for a few minutes. Before they do, Sara tells students that when they come back from break, they will have the option to work alone, in pairs, or in groups of three. She tells them that they will have a choice, and asks them if what she is proposing sounds okay. One student speaks up and says it does. When students come back from their break, Sara tell them they will have about twenty-five minutes to work on the “Analyzing a Character” handout, in which students will be practicing making their own claims with evidence. During this work time, Sara circulates the classroom, moving from various groups and students. I follow her around,

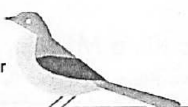
and I notice some students are working in groups, while many others are working alone. I see two boys (Kiwane and a Latino male) working together, on and off, as they are focused on their own papers, don't really talk much to each other, but exchange papers at times. I see another group of three girls (one is African and the other two are African American) sitting clustered together and working together. There is another pairing of two boys (one Latino and one White) who are sitting next to each other and working together. The last group I see is three students—two females and one male, all Latino and Spanish speaking—who work together. The students have chosen to group themselves with people they regularly work with. All other students in the class of about 20 are working alone. One African American male student goes to sit in the classroom library, in the far corner of the classroom, in which there are cushions and shelves that somewhat close off the space. He goes to sit on a cushion to work alone. (fieldnote, November 3, 2014)

The above fieldnote captures some of Sara's regular class activities—modeling literary practices, such as close reading or responding to text by making a claim with evidence, and then allowing students the opportunity to practice what she had modeled. During such times, she provided students the option to work alone or with others. Groups were generally limited to about two to three people. Sara would circulate around the classroom, assisting and checking on various students/groups as needed. The images below are examples of the instructional handouts Sara created and used.

Figure 2. Close reading instructional handout.

## To Kill a Mockingbird, Ch. 9, Close Reading

**Directions:** Read the following passage from ch. 9 and annotate your thoughts, ideas, and/or questions as you read.



---

Atticus sighed. "I'm simply defending a Negro – his name's Tom Robinson. He 100-101  
lives in that little settlement beyond the town dump. He's a member of Calpurnia's  
church, and Cal knows his family well. She says they're clean-living folks. Scout,  
you aren't old enough to understand some things yet, but there's been some high talk  
around town to the effect that I shouldn't do much about defending this man. It's a  
peculiar case – it won't come to trial until summer session. John Taylor was kind  
enough to give us a postponement..."

"If you shouldn't be defendin' him, then why are you doin' it?"

"For a number of reasons," said Atticus. "The main one is, if I didn't I couldn't  
hold up my head in town, I couldn't represent this county in the legislature, I couldn't  
even tell you or Jem not to do something again."

"You mean if you didn't defend that man, Jem and me wouldn't have to mind  
you any more?"

"That's about right."

"Why?"

"Because I could never ask you to mind me again. Scout, simply by the nature  
of the work, every lawyer gets at least one case in his lifetime that affects him  
personally. This one's mine, I guess. You might hear some ugly talk about it at  
school, but do one thing for me if you will: you just hold your head high and keep  
those fists down. No matter what anybody says to you, don't you let 'em get your  
goat. Try fighting with your head for a change...it's a good one, even if it does resist  
learning."

\* Atticus teaches scout to stand  
\* Anti-racist up + control her emotions.

"Atticus, are we going to win it?"

"No, honey."

"Then why –"

"Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason  
for us not to try to win," Atticus said.

Figure 3. Analyzing a character instructional handout.

**Analyzing a Character (RI/RL 3)**

**Character:** Scout

**Claim about Character Development:**  
Scout's identity is impacted by family through Atticus teaching her to be anti-racist.

Evidence that illustrates the development of the character (Direct quote from text)	Explain (Clarify): How this evidence shows the development of the character	Reasoning: Explain why you think that; what inferences are you making? (Make the Connection)
Quote w/ citation:		
Context for understanding the quote:		
Quote w/ citation:		
Context for understanding the quote:		

*Scaffolding academic vocabulary.* As previously mentioned, Sara incorporated various bilingual methods, including scaffolding academic vocabulary, using visuals, and multimodal techniques. Sara told me that her instruction of teaching academic vocabulary was done “in the service of comprehension.” She did this by providing vocabulary lists, which served as a glossary for students when reading TKAM. Below is a sample of such a vocabulary glossary.

Figure 4. TKAM Vocabulary glossary.

To Kill a Mockingbird
STUDENT COPY

**Chapter 11**  
**VOCABULARY**

acquisition – a purchase or possession  
 antagonized – tortured  
 apoplectic – in a state of great anger or excitement  
 bedecked – decorated  
 beholden – in debt  
 cantankerous – difficult; cranky  
 decreed – ordered, commanded  
 degeneration – collapse; decline  
 devoid – empty  
 inaudible – impossible to hear  
 infuriated – angered; enraged  
 interdict – denial of permission; prohibition  
 oppressive – stifling; overwhelming  
 palliation – the act of soothing or relieving pain  
 passé – out of style or use  
 philippic – a bitter tirade  
 premise – a principle or idea  
 propensities – tendencies; inclinations  
 protruded – stuck out  
 reconnaissance – a brief survey  
 rectitude – moral uprightness  
 tranquil – calm  
 umbrage – offense  
 undulate – to rise and fall; move in a wavelike manner  
 viscous – thick  
 wrathful – full of anger

1. Scout tells the reader about Mrs. Dubose. How does she describe the woman? How do Scout and Jem feel about her?

*Older woman with a gun hidden under her quilts & she mostly uses a wheelchair.*

2. As Scout and Jem are returning home from town one day, Jem does something to the shock and astonishment of Scout. What does he do, and why?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

23
STUDY GUIDE

Sara,  
 Given on 10/2/14



During readings of literature circle books, Sara had students document vocabulary words on instructional handouts, like the one featured below, as they read. Sara selected this handout, entitled, “Vocabulary Enricher” from the ReadWriteThink website, powered by the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Literacy Association.

Figure 5. Vocabulary enricher instructional handout.

*Given on 10/9/2014  
Sara, high  
school  
teacher*


### Literature Circle Roles VOCABULARY ENRICHER

The Vocabulary Enricher clarifies word meanings and pronunciations. In this role, the person writes how the word was used in the story and looks up each word in the dictionary. This person would also find the correct definition of the word.

PAGE # PARAGRAPH #	WORD	SENTENCE FROM BOOK	DEFINITION	PLAN
93/7	tautologies			

**PLANS:**

- Group finds words and figures out meaning from context.
- Group chooses correct definition from dictionary.
- Group uses thesaurus to find a synonym to substitute in the sentence.


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The excerpt below comes from an observation towards the beginning of class, in which students had just independently read their literature circle books, and then wrote a summary of what they had read. As students finished writing, Sara gave instructions to prepare them for the next activity she planned for them in their literature circle groups.

Sara: ...so write three great discussion questions based on your reading today.

And secondly, you have a second task related to this, also pick out one vocab word from your reading today. It could be a word you don't know the meaning of, it could be a word that you don't know how to pronounce, it could be a word that you just thought was interesting. You have to choose one vocab word from today's reading. So it could be that you know...the meaning of every single word that you read today, and then you would choose a word that you think was important to discuss. (pause) And you can do that in your vocab chart...

(Students have a couple minutes to work on this task. While students are working, she quietly checks in with several students, one-on-one, for various academic needs.)

Sara: (talking back to the entire class) ...the next step is to get out your chart (the Vocabulary Enricher handout) for vocab words and choose one, you have another spot, choose one more word from today's reading. It shouldn't be from yesterday's reading, it should be from today's reading. Again, it can be a word you don't know the meaning of, it could be a word you don't know how to pronounce, it could be a word that you think is just interesting if you want to talk about or meaningful to what you read today. You're gonna write the page and

paragraph, the word itself and the sentence from the book. Don't worry about the definition and the plan yet...

(Sara gives them a few minutes to complete what she just asked them to do. She again quietly conferences with one student at a time, assisting students as needed with this task or other needs.)

Sara: ...okay, now today in your lit circles, you have two tasks... The first one, just as you have been doing, is the discussion director... The second task you have today is to also share your vocab word. So what's your word, the sentence it was in, ...the page number. And then you have to choose how are you going to figure out the meaning, how are you going to talk about this word. Are you going to, does somebody else in the group know it? And if somebody else in the group knows it, by the way, and you get the definition from them, the person who knows it, you've got to be gracious. You can't say, "augh, how come you don't know that word?" Because there are lots of words that some people know and lots of words that other people don't know. It's really a mixed bag, so you have to be really gracious and respectful about that. ...if you can't find the definition of the word through talking about it, then you let me know, and you'd be able to have devices on for a short amount of time ... I want you to try to figure it out by inference, by the clues first...

We see here that the vocabulary instruction Sara provides here is not about quantity, as she only asks students to select a couple words. Vocabulary words are also student-selected, based on words they may not be familiar with, and thus serves the purpose of students' comprehension of the text. The use of "devices" to find definitions of words is

used as a last resort, since Sara has asked students to “choose how” they will “figure out the meaning” of their vocabulary words. The focus of student “talk” is around utilizing various strategies for better comprehension. We see, then, that Sara’s use of scaffolding academic vocabulary not only serves students’ understanding of texts, but also scaffolds selection of vocabulary words and strategy for varied students.

*Using visuals/multimedia.* Sara also used visuals to teach new literary ideas and build background information. Below is a handout Sara selected to teach symbolism. The following data excerpt is part of the lesson Sara conducted while using this handout.

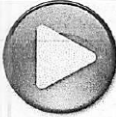




Figure 6. Symbolism instructional handout front side.

Sara,  
Given on 10/27/2014

Resource 3.11

### Practice Explaining Symbols

**Directions:** Remember that a **symbol** is an object with both a literal and figurative meaning; that is, it represents both itself and something else. Using the sentence frame provided, explain both the literal and figurative meaning of each symbol provided below.

EXAMPLE OF SYMBOL	EXPLANATION OF THE SYMBOL
	Literally, this is an image of a <u>circle with a triangle inside it</u> ; but figuratively, it is associated with <u>playing a video</u> .
	Literally, this is an image of <u>a woman in a dress &amp; a man in pants</u> ; but figuratively, it is associated with, <u>using restrooms</u> .
	Literally, this is an image of <u>hand with 2 fingers</u> ; but figuratively, it is associated with, <u>the sign of peace</u> .
	Literally, this is an image of <u>An apple with a bite taken out</u> ; but figuratively, it is associated with, <u>Apple -&gt; iPhone</u> .
	Literally, this is an image of <u>mermaid</u> ; but figuratively, it is associated with, <u>Starbucks</u> .







Front side done under guidance of Sara.  
I copied based on what S wrote on doc cam.

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Figure 7. Symbolism instructional handout back side.

Back side work on own of w/ someone else

Resource 3.11

	<p>Literally, this is an image of _____;</p> <p>but figuratively, it is associated with, _____</p>
	<p>Literally, this is an image of <u>a woman holding a torch</u>;</p> <p>but figuratively, it is associated with, <u>the Statue of Liberty is associated w/ freedom</u>.</p>
	<p>Literally, this is an image of _____;</p> <p>but figuratively, it is associated with, _____</p>
	<p>Literally, this is an image of <u>black &amp; white crayons</u>;</p> <p>but figuratively, it is associated with, <u>written in black &amp; white</u>.</p>
	<p>Literally, this is an image of _____;</p> <p>but figuratively, it is associated with, _____</p>
	<p>Literally, this is an image of <u>hands holding an apple</u>;</p> <p>but figuratively, it is associated with, _____</p>

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Sara: (students have a copy of the “Practice Explaining Symbols” sheet in front of them) ...in chapter 9 and 10, what we’re doing this week, and hopefully we’ll get to 11 as well ... we’re gonna come across some really significant symbols. And when we’re talking about symbolism, you probably have heard discussions of symbolism from English teachers in the past. So before we even get started with our definition ...let’s do fist to five. Fist—you’ve never heard about symbolism in an English class. Five—you know it and you could teach it to somebody else. ...what numbers to we have? (students raise one hand in the air, with the number of fingers representing their familiarity with symbolism) so I’m seeing some fours, I’m seeing some threes, some fists, some twos...so just so we have some background knowledge, we’re gonna go over the definition that we’re gonna use throughout this course...So (she begins to read the directions off of the “Practice Explaining Symbols” sheet) remember that a symbol is an object with both a literal *and* a figurative meaning. That is, it represents both itself and something else. Using the sentence frame provided, explain both the literal and figurative meaning of each symbol provided. (Direction reading ends.) So literal is the dictionary definition, the actual thing. And then the figurative is sort of the feeling or connotation we get from that thing. And the best way to I think understand that definition is by the way of example. ...So look on your handout ...I’m gonna do a couple, we’ll do a couple together, and then you’ll finish the rest...

We see that Sara thinks that “the best way” to understand symbolism is “by the way of example.” The examples she provides are the visuals on the handout. Sara continues the

lesson above by going through each picture, one at a time, and talks about the literal and figurative definition of the picture. As is her practice, she modeled completing the first couple examples, then incorporated more student input as they completed examples, and had students complete the backside of the handout with others. As she modeled how to think about each picture, she also modeled how to complete each sentence in the box to the right of the picture. In the handout artifact above, I have written down the words as she wrote them down and projected for students to see.

Another way that Sara used visuals was to build background knowledge. One of the short stories I observed Sara teach was, “The Scarlet Ibis,” as previously mentioned. Prior to reading the short story, Sara built students’ background knowledge by showing them visuals relevant to the story. Below is a fieldnote excerpt of the part of the lesson in which she does this.

It is about 20 minutes into the class, and I have returned to the classroom after going to the computer lab, in an attempt to gain wireless internet access on my iPad. I sit back down in my seat, which is a student’s desk, closest to the “screen” the LCD projects on. It is not a real screen, but a large, bare brick wall, painted white, and used as a screen. Shortly after sitting down, Sara passes out a handout to the students. She gives instruction to the whole class and brings their attention to the white wall. She projects various pieces of background information about “The Scarlet Ibis.” Included in this information is a picture of an actual scarlet ibis (bird), as well as a picture of a swamp. Sara tells the class that she is showing these images to students because it is unlikely to see this bird in [name of local town], nor is it swampy in this area. (fieldnote, September 9, 2014)



We see Sara show the actual bird, as well as a swamp, prior to reading the story. The use of visuals for all students provides opportunity for those who may not be familiar with such vocabulary to learn about elements critical to the comprehension of the story. By showing this to everyone, students who may not be familiar with such terms are not required to reveal their unfamiliarity with these terms. In this way, the use of such visuals aids understanding of the text. Other visuals Sara incorporated included multimodal techniques, such as the use of video. An example of this was Sara's use of the TED talk video, found at this site:

[http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story?language=en](http://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en)

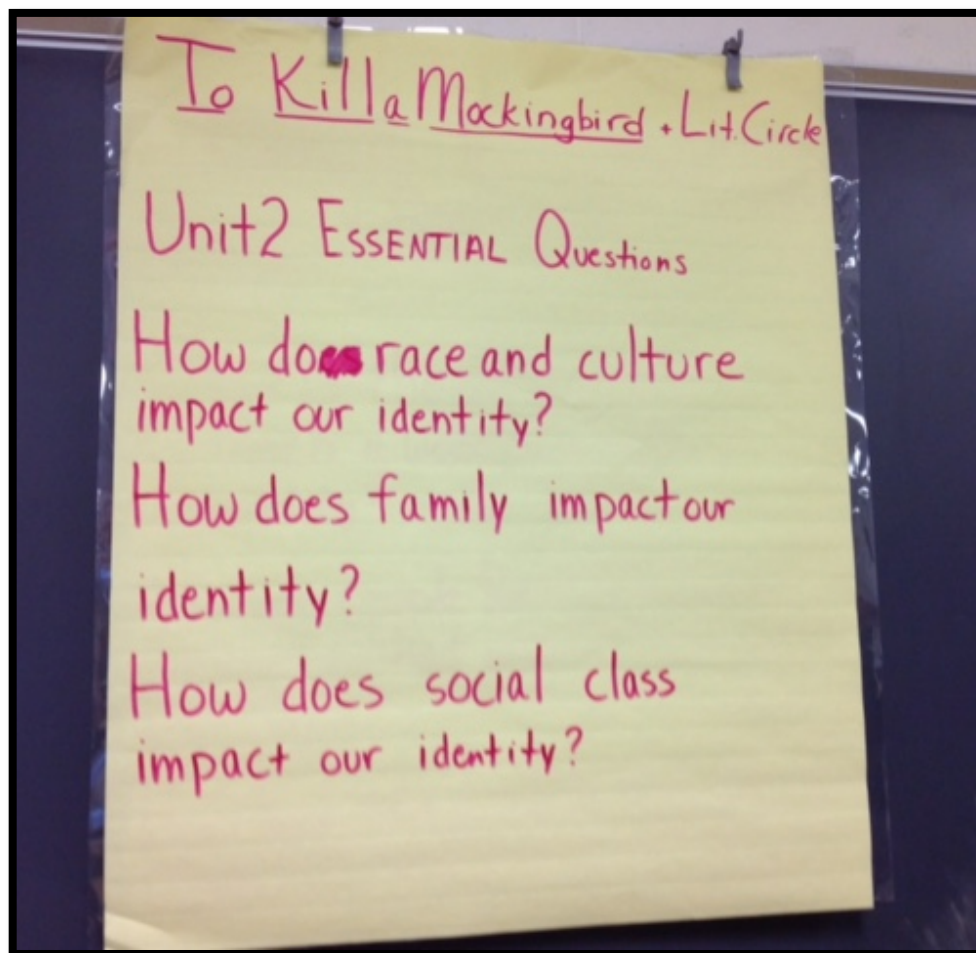
The video features Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's speech, "The Danger of a Single Story," which discusses Western stereotypes of African culture, and how the use of stereotypes are linked to issues of power. Sara used this video as part of several lessons to teach lessons around racial identity, as will be further discussed in the next section.

**View of language and culture infused in a sociopolitical unit.** Another theme that I identified from Sara's accumulated knowledge was the notion that language and culture are a significant part of one's identity and connection with family. We first see this theme when Sara shared about her experience with a cab driver in Singapore, and how she realized that language and culture are "a whole part of who you are," but often "cut off" through schooling. Later, she talked about a key idea that she learned from Dr. A, which was a view of student language in context of the child's family (how a mother speaks to a child), and personal life (how a child dreams). From these experiences, we

see an important theme for Sara, in the way that she understands language, and as she personifies that knowledge into her pedagogy.

**Literature circles.** As mentioned above, the primary unit I observed Sara teach revolved around the “essential questions” she determined for that unit. They were: 1) How do race and culture impact our identity?, 2) How does family impact our identity?, and 3) How does social class impact our identity? The image below is the poster with these questions that Sara hung on her classroom wall.

Figure 8. Sociopolitical unit essential questions poster.



Issues of race, culture, family, class, and identity were addressed through the study of various texts. These guiding questions illuminate the sociopolitical nature of an individual within the larger society. Sara used various texts, such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and a selection of novels, to guide students toward greater awareness of their own sociopolitical positionality. This subsection focuses on her accomplishment of this endeavor through her selection of novels used for literature circles. During the first twenty minutes of Sara's eighty-minute class, students independently read literature circle books they chose, based on books Sara pre-selected. After the first twenty minutes of independent reading, students would move into their literature circles, in groups of three to five, based on the book they selected. For this literature circle time, Sara would provide parameters for small group discussion/activity about the novel. Students created discussion questions for times in their small group. The books Sara selected were representative of the languages and cultures of the students within the classroom. Those books were: *American Born Chinese* by Gene Luen Yang, *The Glass Castle* by Jeanette Walls, *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago* by LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie, *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* by Marjane Satrapi, *A Lesson Before Dying* by Ernest Gaines, and *When We Wuz Famous* by Greg Takoudes. *American Born Chinese* features the struggles for a Chinese American boy in his desire to be "all-American." Similarly, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is also written from the perspective of a Native American, and details his schooling experiences in an all-White town. *Our America: Life and Death on the South Side of Chicago* tell the stories of two African American boys, the authors of the book, their experiences growing up in

Chicago's Ida B. Wells housing project, and also incorporates the use of AAL in the book. *When We Wuz Famous* is about a Latino boy who is forced to negotiate his life back in his neighborhood and life at his new boarding school. This book also incorporates features of AAL, as well as Spanish language. Sara's selection of literature circle books created space for students to see cultures and language that was representative of them within the classroom. In this way, she enacts her view that a student's language and culture should not be cut off in school. We see Sara also enact this view as she taught other elements of this sociopolitical unit.

***Racial identity vis-à-vis racism.*** After observing Sara, and the sociopolitical nature of many activities in her pedagogy, I wondered what specific role her view of language/culture as integral to identity played in her decision-making. In a follow-up interview, I asked Sara about this exact issue, and her explanation helped me better understand her thinking when executing various parts of this unit. The data in this section depict Sara's frame for understanding race in her students' lives, which I have named as a "two part" view of race. We will see that she conceives of race in two parts—the external, which she has defined as racism, and the internal, the racial identity of a person.

*Racial identity.* In the excerpt below, Sara explains her interpretation of how her students may make sense of their worlds, as it relates to race and gender.

Sara: ...so language can help us know our world...especially teenagers...I think sometimes when they're experiencing something like discrimination or sexism and...racism, because ...their identity is still so self-central, they internalize it. ...so it just feels like ...they experience it as depression or it triggers depression

when there's a larger cultural context... So I think the younger you can start labeling that... for kids, in helping them think through that, the less likely they're going to take it and turn it against themselves... because of that, there's still the, so there's two parts to anything ...whether it's racism or sexism, there's the internalizing part and there's the externalized part, and if I can help buffer against the internalized part and say, "no...this isn't about you"... kids are aware of it...and some if it is playing out in their lives, either directly or indirectly. ...I don't know if I'm wrong or not, but I do think that it's almost therapeutic for kids to know this stuff relatively early. And not to become cynical about the world ... they have to do something about the external stuff, but at least to not use it against themselves.

We see that Sara understands issues of "racism or sexism" in a dual way—with "internalizing" and "externalizing" parts. Her concern is that as students witness the "larger cultural context" being played "out in their lives," they may "turn it against themselves" and result in mental health issues, like depression. From Sara's perspective, it is "therapeutic" for students to know "relatively early" the external factors contributing to varied discriminatory practices. Her "two part" view of race, then, consists of the internal and the external, and notion that being educated about the external will help "buffer" what occurs at the internal level. She further articulates this point below by naming the external part as "racism," and the internal part as "racial identity."

Sara: ...and there are these combinations too... masculinity and African American, these things that make...these intersections that make life really really hard ...if you don't unpack them, and language is part of that... there's racism

and there's also racial identity, and they're two different things. So racial identity, buoying that up... affirming language, using characters ...speaking to the reality...building community within a classroom, having difficult conversations ... that's all very very nurturing. So ...on one hand, very nurturing ...you're not a single story, you don't have to cut off any part of your identity, you bring it all... there's nothing that you have to cut off... all of that is very nurturing.

As a teacher, Sara addresses the internal aspect of race, “racial identity,” by “buoying that up” through “very nurturing” strategies, like, “affirming language,” “using characters,” “speaking to the reality,” “building community within a classroom,” and “having difficult conversations.” She also links her students knowing that they are “not a single story” to not needing “to cut off any part of your identity.”

Sara enacted this view of language/culture as integral to identity through several activities she planned, called “The Danger of a Single Story.” Under the previous subsection about how Sara incorporated bilingual methods, I highlighted her use of Adichie’s video as a multimodal technique. Below are the instructional handouts Sara selected and used to guide students in understanding the idea of a “single story.”

Figure 9. Danger of a single story: Task 1.

Given 9/30/14

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

The Danger of A Single Story

Learning Targets

1. I can deepen my understanding of **identity** to understand complex characters and people.
2. I can use **voice** and vibrant **word choice** to write a short **vignette** revealing the danger of a single story.

Glossary

**Identity**-The distinguishing character or personality of a character

**Vignette**-A short, descriptive incident or written sketch

**Voice**-The unique personality of a narrator

**Word Choice** (also called diction)-the choice of a particular word as opposed to others

Task 1

Chimamanda Adichie is a storyteller who teaches her audience by sharing **vignettes** about her life. Watch the video of her talk and take notes on the following:

A time when Adichie made assumptions about someone based on "a single story."	A time when someone else made assumptions about Adichie based on "a single story."

①

Figure 10. Danger of a single story: Task 2.

Key: - (last if unsure about meaning)  
 ✓ (if knew everything she's saying)

Task 2: Read and annotate (read with your pen) this excerpt from Chimamanda Adichie's Ted Talk

The Danger of a Single Story

Why is a "Single Story" dangerous? Know 1 thing about them.

I come from a conventional, middle-class Nigerian family. ✓

What do we know about the narrator? How did her identity contribute to her belief in a single story about Fide?

My father was a professor. ✓  
 My mother was an administrator. ✓  
 And so we had, as was the norm,  
 — live-in domestic help, who would often come from nearby rural villages. —  
 So the year I turned eight we got a new house boy. —  
 His name was Fide.  
 The only thing my mother told us about him was that his family was very poor. single story  
 My mother sent yams and rice, ✓  
 and our old clothes, to his family. ✓  
 And when I didn't finish my dinner my mother would say, ✓  
 "Finish your food! Don't you know? People like Fide's family have nothing." ✓  
 So I felt enormous pity for Fide's family. ✓  
 Then one Saturday we went to his village to visit, ✓  
 and his mother showed us a beautifully patterned basket ✓  
 made of dyed raffia that his brother had made. ✓  
 I was startled.  
 It had not occurred to me that anybody in his family

She is a "regular" person from Nigeria.  
 She is distanced from Fide's poverty so she makes assumptions about his life.

What is the opposite of a single story?

could actually make something.  
 All I had heard about them was how poor they were,  
 so that it had become impossible for me to see them  
 as anything else but poor.

(2)



Figure 11. Danger of a single story: Task 3.

Their poverty was my single story of them.

Task 3

Brainstorm a list of times when you were viewed as merely "a single story" by others and a list of times when you wrongfully viewed others as "a single story."  
Then, write a short vignette about ONE of those times.

Times when I made incorrect assumptions about someone based on "a single story."	Times when someone else made assumptions about me based on "a single story."

Vignette

3

Sara asked students to engage in various “tasks” around this idea, including taking notes while watching Adichie’s speech, annotating a transcript of Adichie’s speech, and making personal connections to the idea of “a single story.” In the following two excerpts, Sara shares examples in the news, as well as a personal experience to illustrate “a single story.” This first excerpt is during the “Task 2” lesson, and Sara uses news events to explain how “a single story” can be “fatal.”

Sara: ...What is a single story and why is it dangerous?

Kiwane: ...a single story is like me telling you one thing about myself, or somebody telling you one thing about me and then ...you won’t get the full picture of how somebody is, then you will just think that they’re a bad person...that’s what your opinion is...you don’t like that person

Sara: ...you might just know one thing about a person and then that is the way that you see them, and that is super super dangerous. Can we think of some examples of a single story being very very dangerous? Yes (acknowledging a boy to speak)

Dan: rumors

Sara: okay, sometimes rumors can be very very dangerous. Let’s think about the news too, over the last couple of years. ...When has it actually been deadly? ...

[...various students speak softly at same time but recorder is unable to pick up speech]

Sara: ...there are a couple of major stories in the last few years. One is from the summer, Ferguson, in Missouri, and another one is Trayvon Martin.

[...various students speak softly at same time but recorder is unable to pick up speech]

Sara: So the person who shot Trayvon Martin ...had a single stereotypical story in his mind. Trayvon Martin was going to the store and coming home *in his own neighborhood*. And the shooter only saw a single story through a stereotype that he learned in the media, right? So the single story can actually be fatal. It can be dangerous, if you're only seeing one part of a person.

Here Sara explains "a single story" as "only seeing one part of a person." Because of "a single story through a stereotype" the shooter of Trayvon Martin kills him in "in his own neighborhood." She uses this example to illustrate how "a single story" can be "very very dangerous," and "fatal." Sara's lesson is consistent with her view of "buoying" students' racial identities. She is "speaking to the reality" and "having difficult conversations" about the "fatal" and "dangerous" consequences of those who subscribe to "single story" views of others. Later in the lesson, a student was confused about what "a single story" was. Sara stopped the lesson in order to share a personal experience that she used to further illustrate what "a single story" is.

Sara: ...okay, so here's my vignette as an example...so you're just looking at one perspective of them. So, when I fly, I don't care if I'm going ...to another country or another state, when I fly with my family, it's me, my husband who's Chinese, and our two kids who are half-half...they are half Caucasian, half Asian. And every time we get into line, my husband will give the ID over and try to get the tickets and they tell me to back up, even if I'm with ...my kids. Because they don't put me together with my husband. ...they look at me and say "back up,"

because they don't assume that I'm with my husband. And it doesn't matter where, it could be in any country. It's happened to me in Asia, it's happened to me in the US. ...The single story is that we couldn't be together, even with the evidence of two little children...

Sara uses a personal example to further illustrate how others who do not “assume” she could be married to a Chinese man view her from a “single story” perspective. Also notable is that while Sara does not explicitly link the Ferguson/Trayvon Martin and personal examples to race, both use race as the “stereotype” through which others judge. From my observational data of Sara, I interpret her instruction using “a single story” as a way of facilitating space within her classroom where students do not feel the need to “cut off” their cultural and linguistic identities. My interpretation matches what Sara previously stated about her intentions of teaching Adichie’s “Danger of a Single Story,” which were about fostering students’ racial identities. It should be noted that while “a single story” is used here as a way to view others through negative perceptions, single stories can be enlightening or empowering. Rosa Parks, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Nelson Mandela are examples of single stories that have been used to empower others. Of course, historical retelling of these stories is inaccurate at times; the use of their stories can be enlightening for larger causes. In the next subsection, Sara addresses the other “part,” the external aspect of race, as it plays out in her students’ lives.

*Racism.* The excerpt below is a continuation of the conversation, in which Sara initially explained her “two part” view of race. I have included the last part of the conversation from data in the previous section to better help us follow her thinking. Here she addresses what she considers the external aspects of race—racism.

Sara: ...So ...on one hand, very nurturing ...you're not a single story, you don't have to cut off any part of your identity, you bring it all... there's nothing that you have to cut off... all of that is very nurturing. That other aspect of... being able to name, label things like racism, and sexism... and heterosexism ...the history of ... understanding ...you didn't just drop into it, it's not just happening to you now. There's been people trying to work to eliminate it in high schools ... there are ways that people can come together to push back against it. And one of the ways is to ...be nurtured, to have teachers who are ...culturally competent, optimistic, loving, and all those good things, and skilled ...also to be able to unpack all the bullshit. ...and you have more choices, so if you're ... identity is just, "I've got these two choices of how to be a young man, and I don't... really know how to do it, but I'm getting all this input from culture" ... But if you can unpack it, then you have more choice, you have more room ... to make some choices about your future and your identity.

Consistent with her view that being educated about external factors help in student identity construction, Sara says that "being able to name" and "label" various discriminatory practices are ways students have more "choices" about their "future" and "identity." Students are able to do this, though, as a result of "culturally competent, optimistic, loving," and "skilled" teachers, who can "unpack all the bullshit." Sara does the work of "unpack[ing] all the bullshit" of racism through lessons on naming sociopolitical factors in the "larger cultural context." From the instructional handout that Sara created below, we see a document that explicitly defines terms, such as: racism, prejudice, race, culture, institutional racism, White privilege, segregation, and stereotype.

This handout was used to help students consider the various class texts/readings from these concepts.

Figure 12. Race concepts instructional handout.

	Racism	Prejudice	Race	Culture	Institutional Racism	White Privilege	Segregation	Stereotype
What's the definition?	Prejudice + Power	Judging someone before you know anything about them.	Race is a classification system used to categorize people by ethnicity.	The behaviors and beliefs of a particular social, ethnic, or age group.	Institutional racism describes any kind of system of inequality based on race. It can occur in institutions such as public government bodies, private business corporations, and universities.	Unearned privilege given to a racial group based on appearance.	The action or state of setting someone or something apart from other people or things or being set apart.	A widely held but fixed and oversimplified image or idea of a particular type of person or thing.
"The Danger of A Single Story"								
"Unpacking the Invisible Backpack"	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓
"Loving" article								

Included in the texts/readings Sara selected to illustrate these larger sociopolitical factors were: Adichie's "The Danger of a Single Story," Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," the "Loving" article, the literature circle book, and Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. The example below is a fieldnote excerpt from a class activity in which Sara incorporated the idea of institutional racism. The class had finished meeting in their literature circle groups. On this particular day, Sara had students, group by group, share with the entire class what they had discussed in their literature circles.

After lit circle groups were over, Sara called the class back together so that groups could share out. Students were seated around the room, with their groups, in a way so that students could see each other. The first group to share out was the one that was reading *Our America*. Two female students, both African American, spoke as representatives for their group. One shared about how a character in the book died as a result of an intentional delay in the ambulance's arrival. Sara asked the group what their response was to that occurrence. Several students, responding at the same time, talked about how they would be angry. Sara affirms their anger by saying, "yeah, yeah." Sara talks about how the characters were not "able to depend on the health system." She then asked them, "remember when we talked about those different terms and we talked about institutional racism? And we talked about how different institutions, like schools and medical institutions and police sometimes have these things embedded in them? Do you think that was at play in this neighborhood at all? Or is it something that happens or could happen anywhere?" A student responds to Sara (inaudible), and Sara asks the

student “what makes you think it was at play?” Several students responded (inaudible), and Sara rephrases their response by saying, “okay, so the way they reacted to the neighborhood when they left her. Absolutely. And a neighborhood, whatever you call it, is a neighborhood. You call it a neighborhood, you call it the hood, you call it a barrio.” One of the students from this lit circle group said that “the ghetto does not mean black.” Other students then join in and are responding to each other at the same time. Sara affirms this student’s response by saying “uh-huh” (meaning yes) and then adds, “it could be any neighborhood” linking it to how the term was used during WWII era. (fieldnote and audio-recording, October 10, 2014)

We see here that Sara returns to the idea of “institutional racism,” through an illustration that students brought up from their literature circle books. Her instruction and facilitation of this discussion matches her “two part” view of race, which positions racism as something “external” that needs to be “label[ed],” “name[d],” and not a situation that one “just drop[s] into.” Consequently, Sara “labels” various institutions like, “schools,” “medical institutions,” “police,” as places in which racism is “embedded in.” By probing students to think about if what occurred to the character is “something that happens or could happen anywhere,” she is asking students to make connections about institutional racist events that occur within the book and those within their own lives. In naming the delayed ambulance event as an instance of “institutional racism,” Sara helps student interpret this tragedy as a systemic problem.

Another example of Sara discussing sociopolitical issues through a lesson on *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In this lesson, Sara conducted a character analysis of Scout, and



included how race, class, and family contributed to her character. The following data comes at a point in the lesson in which Sara is modeling for students how to make a claim about Scout's identity using evidence from the text.

Sara: This particular assignment we're gonna look at Scout's understanding of social class, and how that impacts her identity...and then we're going to look at ... family...and we'll be looking at how race and culture impact her. So the first thing we have to do is decide... that we're okay with focusing in on Scout. ...We could look at some of the other characters but no one's as fully developed as her, and even though she herself is not African American, the culture of that small town, that southern White culture, is impacting her. Her perspective that Atticus is trying to develop that anti-racist perspective, that is definitely impacting her. So even race and culture, when it comes to social class, she's not in that really really ... difficult position of the Cunninghams or the Ewells. She's more privileged, but she's aware of how her privilege impacts her and how social class impacts those around her. And, of course, family is huge with Scout.

Here Sara includes Scout as someone who has both race and culture. Sara names her culture as that of a "southern" and "small town," and her race as "White." She also mentions Scout's social class positionality as "privileged," as well as the "huge" impact family has on Scout. Later in the lesson, Sara comes back to the idea of anti-racism as she leads students to think about how family ideologies are shaping Scout's identity.

Sara: ...What is Atticus teaching Scout? What stance is he trying to teach her to have?

Kiwane: Not to be like everybody

Sara: ...the term that we're using there is anti-racist. ...it's not just being neutral, saying "oh, ...I don't know one way or the other." It's actually actively fighting against racism. So the family lesson is to try to teach her to be anti-racist...

Sara further articulates here for students her definition of "anti-racist," which is "not just being neutral," but "actively fighting against racism." Her elaboration of this term is in line with her view that it is important to educate and have discussions with students about racism. We see another example of this view as she shared with me about an incident that occurred to one of her students. During a follow-up interview, Sara told me about one of her Latino male students, who had goals of pursuing a future career in the medical field. On one occasion, he had come up to her to tell her about an incident in which his dog ran away, and decided to knock on doors in his neighborhood to see if they had seen his dog. She retold the event to me, paraphrasing his words:

Sara: ... "no sooner did that happen than a cop car pull up behind me, asking me why ...I was knocking on these doors," he said, "and I knew what was going on, and I was able to say, 'I'm just looking for my dog.'"...in that moment...everything we had talked about with single stories and perceptions, he was armed with that. He knew what was going on.

Sara shares this incident to illustrate how one of her students was "armed" with knowing "what was going on" when the police followed him, as a result of "everything we had talked about with single stories and perceptions." Sara's interpretation of him being "armed" is in line with her view that if students are able to "unpack" the sociopolitical context of racist events, then students are able to have "more choice," about their "future" and "identity." It is feasible, then, for Sara to perhaps interpret this student's awareness

and education about racism as way to help him achieve future ambitions in the field of medicine. From these sections on racial identity and racism, we gain a better understanding of Sara's view of race, language, culture, and how these issues play a role in her curricular and instructional design. In what I have named as her "two part" view of race, racial identity and racism are separate entities, internal and external. Sara defines racism as the "input from culture" and external structures that can "cut off" parts of a person's identity, language, and culture through a "single story" lens. Racial identity, from Sara's perspective, is how a person internally constructs what occurs on the external level. She views her role as a teacher, then, to "label," "name," and "unpack" the "larger cultural context" (e.g., institutional racism, White privilege, sexism, etc.) as a way of "buffer[ing]" students from turning "single story" views "against themselves." The data put forth in these sections are intended to show Sara's enactment of her knowledge in the classroom, and thus, an embodied toolkit.

Her "two part" view of race is a way she has made sense of sociopolitical issues that are personally and professionally significant to her, as data have shown. According to aforementioned literature on cognitive development from a sociocultural lens, as well as other frames, such as critical race theory, issues of race and racial identity are understood in differing and more complex ways. The mention of such literature is not to evaluate or make judgments of Sara's views in any way. Like Tiera, and is true for all teachers and humans alike, we are on journeys of ever-increasing growth and knowledge. Viewing teachers on a continuum of growth pushes back on tendencies to valorize teachers in educational and political contexts. Therefore my interpretation of Sara is neither to put her on a pedestal nor diminish her work, but rather, as a way to illustrate

how a person with a developed accumulated knowledge of language will embody what she knows in her daily pedagogical practices. The next subsection focuses on one student who was able to benefit from such practices.

***Kiwane.*** One student who did not have to “cut off” cultural and linguistic parts of who he was, while in Sara’s class, was Kiwane. Sara referred to as him as her “lead” student, “successful,” and respected by “all of his classmates.” Kiwane is an African American male, whose diverse linguistic repertoire includes LWC and also AAL. He was a sophomore in her freshman pilot English class during Fall 2014. Sara informed me that it was his second time enrolled in the course because he had failed this course the previous year, for reasons unclear to me. In Sara’s class, however, there were many parts of Kiwane that he did not have to “cut off,” such as his academic achievement, past and current life experiences, and his language as an AAL speaker.

*Lead student.* In a follow-up interview, Sara shared about Kiwane’s “successful” academic achievement, and why she thought her class was meaningful to him.

Sara: ...And I think what it is—

Alice: feeling successful, or

Sara: yeah, feeling successful, being successful, really being the lead student, you know, *really* the lead student. He even said, he’s like, “...when I leave, [chuckles while talking] no one’s ...gonna say anything,” and I was ...worried... but it forced the issue ...other kids took up the mantle. ... it made me make sure I was calling on enough people ...

Alice: ...so that’s how you would describe him, as your lead student?

Sara: oh yeah. Yeah. ...I think [male student] passed because of Kiwane.

Kiwane was like, “don’t you want to be someone?” And [male student] was like, “yeah, kinda.” (Sara laughs) And his (male student) skills matched that intent by the end of the year. ...[male student] was producing by the end of the year, producing evidence ...

Alice: so Kiwane helped...?

Sara: I think so

Alice: They did work together a lot

Sara: They did

Sara’s retelling of Kiwane’s acknowledgement about other students “say[ing] anything” informs us that he, too, was aware of his role as the “lead student.” Her description of him was not only as a leader in class discussion, but also as someone who led others toward academic achievement as well.

The data below are examples of Kiwane’s regular participation during whole class discussion. These excerpts highlight parts of the aforementioned lesson, “Task 2” in the series of lessons on “The Danger of a Single Story.” In this lesson, Sara used a system of “checks and dashes” as a way to annotate the text—a “check” symbolized a secure understanding, and a “dash” represented being unsure about the meaning of a statement. She modeled for students this system by annotating a copy of the handout, as it was projected onto the white wall. Students followed along by annotating their own papers as she taught. This excerpt begins at a point in the lesson where had Sara read the text, “My father was a professor. My mother was an administrator. And so we had, as was the norm, live-in domestic help, who would often come from nearby rural villages.” She

asked students to use “checks and dashes” on their own sheets to note of their understanding. This excerpt begins with Sara asking students about what areas of the text they marked. The hyphens before and after a person’s turn denote no time lapse between the turn. Multiple turns with hyphens at the beginning and end would sound like a conversation between two people.

Sara: ...what does her father do?

Kiwane: He’s a teacher in a college.

Sara: Yeah, a teacher in a college. Good, so you used synonyms to describe “professor.” Okay, and (referring back to text) “My mother was an administrator”—

Kiwane: --like a principal or a dean or something—

Sara: --okay, ...could be a principal or dean...—

Kiwane: --counselor

Sara: counselor, could be ...run a hospital...an administrator could be a number of different things, but it’s a position of authority and power, so that’s her mom...(pause, Sara goes back to reading the text) “And so we had, as was the norm,” as was typical for middle-class families, “live-in domestic help.” Okay, what is that? (pause) What is that—live in-domestic help? (pause) What does that mean?

(Silence from class)

Other male student: ...help

Sara: okay, they needed a lot of, they needed some help. It was the norm to have some help...this is not common in the US...other countries do, but we don't have a lot of this

Kiwane: ...domestic means...

Sara: Domestic means home help. Domestic is home. So what could a helper do in a home? What types—

Kiwane: --clean, cook—

Sara: --Clean, cook—

Kiwane: --...--

Sara: --take care of children, take care of elderly...do they live in their own home or do they live with Adichie's family

Kiwane: They live with a person family

Sara: They live with a person's family... And where would they come from?

Kiwane: ...a nearby village

Sara: okay, some from rural villages they would come in...

The excerpt of this close reading sounded like a conversation between two people, Sara and Kiwane. Aside from one other student taking a turn in the lesson, Kiwane is the only student participant in this whole class discussion. This example is not unlike many of the class discussions I observed. At times, when lessons mostly consisted of these back and forth responses between Sara and Kiwane, like the one shown here, Sara would acknowledge Kiwane's leadership and elicit participation from other students. The excerpt below comes a little later in the same lesson above.

Sara: ...So, [name of other male student], what is the opposite of a single story?

(pause) What's the opposite of single story? Think about that.

(Silence, no response from the male student Sara called on)

Sara: What's the opposite of a single story?

Kiwane: Can I share what I think?

Sara: Just hold on Kiwane. You've been helping us out so much, I want everyone to think about it. Everyone think about what would be the opposite of a single story.

Within the context of what Sara has told us about Kiwane as "lead student," his own awareness of his contribution to class discussion, and the data provided above, we can interpret Sara's response for Kiwane to "hold on," and asking others to "think about it," as a way she elicits participation from the rest of the class. Kiwane's participation and contribution to discussion was also evident from outside parties, like guest speakers. Sara told me about how a guest speaker in their classroom responded to Kiwane.

Sara: after... you left... we did the Wrongful Convictions unit, ...the very last thing [class activity to the unit] we did is have an attorney from the Illinois Innocence Project to come ...and the attorney did his speech, ... and Kiwane went up to him afterward and said, "I am so interested in all of this. I want to be a lawyer. And this attorney gave him his card, said, "...I've heard what you've been saying during this presentation, you're really astute, you're on point..."

The information Sara provides here about the attorney's observations of Kiwane as "really astute," and "on point," are consistent with both Sara's perceptions of him and also my observations as well. It could be tempting, at this juncture, to speculate how or



why he was so “successful” in Sara’s class. To make such an assertion would move towards issues of causality, a point outside the scope of my inquiry. The data provided are to show, not *why* he was the “lead student,” but simply that he *was*, and that he *could be* in Sara’s class; his intellect was not something that needed to be “cut off” to exist within that space. This is significant because of longstanding stereotypes of being Black and unintelligent. While these stereotypes have been proven unfounded and racist, time and again, they continue to set boundaries and limitations for how Black children are often perceived and treated in schooling.

*Past life experiences.* Another aspect of his life Kiwane did not need to “cut off” in Sara’s classroom was his past experiences. In the data below, Sara again mentions Kiwane’s academic participation, but also alludes to his past “trauma.”

Sara: ...I think he felt particularly comfortable and safe in his small cohort, especially talking about *Our America*. But then in the whole class, too, he was ...performing so well and getting affirmed for it. ...it was really clear ... and what he was doing, he was enacting ... scholarly discussion and perfect, on point academic talk. But he also didn’t have to cut anything off ... The trauma stuff came up, ...probably the part that he didn’t have to cut off was being this ... high performing student, and I think he really loved that....

Alice: ...this high performing student while being Black

Sara: Exactly, exactly. ... and traumatized...

In this dialogue, Sara affirms the coexistence of his academic achievement and race, which is significant due to persistent stereotypes mentioned above. In the conversation,

Sara also mentions another part of his life that “he didn't have to cut off,” his “trauma stuff.” In the excerpt below, Sara further explained what “trauma” he experienced.

Alice: ...Kiwane...how would you describe him?

Sara: [Sara doesn't respond and breaks down in tears. Long pause.] ...Kiwane... has a trauma narrative ... and he brought that up sometimes in class. So Kiwane needed... his trauma needed to be treated, and instead we just re-traumatized him by having the police take him away in cuffs and expel him ... so he [again breaks down in tears, pause]...he's just had so much trauma and untreated that...I think schools are going to have to change so that we're aware of how much trauma our students have, ...

Alice: ... was his traumatizing ... history mostly with...police...issues?

Sara: He's already been tased as a young kid... had already been tased before he came into our class ...by the police... But, I think the primary injury is the violent death of his own father...

Another, very personal, part of his life that Kiwane did not need to “cut off” was his “trauma narrative,” that he had shared with the class. Sara continued to share what another student had said to her after Kiwane was “re-traumatized.”

Sara: ...I don't know why she said this, but when this [arrested by police] happened, [female student]...said, “if he was still in our class, this wouldn't have happened.” And I don't know why she said that ... but I think there was something in their conversations they were having in their small groups that was...or maybe it was her interaction with him daily, there was something really

grounding for him ...so from her perspective, there was something that was happening positive ... during that time...

We see here that, based on what Sara has informed us, one of Kiwane's classmates argues a relationship between him being "re-traumatized" and his participation in the class. I present this data, not to draw causal links between the events in Kiwane's life and Sara's class, but to highlight another part of his life that Kiwane did not have to "cut off." It was evident, even to other classmates, Sara's class potentially played a role in providing space for Kiwane's multiple identities.

*Current life experiences.* Kiwane also did not have to cut parts of his current life experiences from his classmates. On one day, in which Sara was absent, and there was a sub in the class, Kiwane shared about aspects of his current life situation, and his future life goals.

When I open the door to Sara's classroom, and think I'm in the wrong location. Sara is nowhere to be found, and an older African American male asks me two times, "can I help you?" as he stands in the doorway. I come to my senses and realize Sara has a sub today. I explain that I am a regular observer of Sara, and he allows me access into the classroom. I sit down in my regular seat, and see that a middle-aged, bearded White male is Sara's sub for the day. He had drawn a "Prisoner's dilemma" type chart on the chalkboard, and was engaging some of the students in a discussion about whether they would "snitch" or "not snitch" on someone. I notice that about half of the students, those in the three rows facing me, on the other side of the room, are completely ignoring the discussion the sub is leading. Those on the opposite side of the room are independently reading a

book or having their own small group conversations. The other half of the students, those sitting on the same side of the room as me, are discussing with each other and with the sub. There are several side conversations simultaneously occurring that, at times, moves into a larger conversation. Even then, side conversations do not stop when larger conversations develop. At one point, I notice the sub mostly engaging Kiwane in discussion. Kiwane, talking to the sub, and with a volume audible for many around him to hear, begins to share personally. He contrasts his academic performance last year with this year, saying he is “perfect” this year, getting “As” and “Bs.” He shares, “I have a daughter now and she my motivation.” Kiwane also shares that, “People underestimate me,” but that he has a “plan” and “steps” to accomplishing his future goals. He says, “My objective right now is to finish high school,” and the next step is to go to college. He also talks about how he is going to be a millionaire someday, but that his ultimate goal is not to be rich, but “someone people look up to.” He closes his personal sharing by saying, “People don’t know me, I wish people did, but they don’t know the real me.” (fieldnote, November 5, 2014)

From Kiwane’s sharing about his past experiences, as well as those more current, shared in this data, we see that Kiwane willingly offers personal information about his past and current academic achievement, as well as future life goals. Among his classmates, and with a stranger, the sub, Kiwane shares about being a father, and how “she [is] my motivation.” Even though Sara was not present that day, she had already informed me that Kiwane previously wrote about these life experiences in class assignments. The data

presented about Kiwane's purposeful inclusion of both his past and current experiences show not only that he did not find the need to "cut off" these areas of his life, but that there was also space provided for him to exist within that classroom, as he was.

*Usage of AAL.* Another area Kiwane did not need to "cut off" in Sara's classroom was his varied use of language. During a class reading of the novel, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Sara paused to discuss how the character, Mrs. Dubose, did not believe Scout would amount to much in life. Mrs. Dubose commented on how Scout would never become more than a waitress. Sara and Kiwane then engaged in the following dialogue:

Sara: She's telling Scout that Scout's going to be a waitress... there's nothing wrong with being a waitress, since it can make a nice living. *But*, with a little kid, ...you don't want to just say that's *all* that they can do—

Kiwane: Man, that's downin' somebody. That's like your teacher tellin' you ain't gonna be nuttin'.

Sara: That's right. That's exactly right.

Kiwane: Yeah, ... there's a lot of people who told me that.

Sara: Kiwane, what's your answer when somebody says that?

Kiwane: I said, I don't... [inaudible talking]

Sara: You said, watch me?

Kiwane: Yeah

Sara: Yeah

Kiwane: No, I don't say that. ... but then again, I told one teacher, one time, you're here to help me make more money than you make.

Sara: That's right. (chuckles) That's right. *And*, any adult ... wants the next generation, their children, their students to be even happier and more successful than them.

Kiwane: ... I'm goin' overseas (...to live in a mansion-from fieldnote) to China or somethin'. Or Moscow.

In this exchange, Kiwane draws on his personal experiences, paralleling other teachers' perceptions of him to Mrs. Dubose's view of Scout. Unlike the teacher from the Wheeler excerpt I provided teachers during initial interviews, Sara makes no correction of his choice of language. Instead, Sara's response to Kiwane focuses solely on his thoughts about such perceptions. In this way, her inquiry about his thoughts and experiences makes space for Kiwane's use of AAL, and not language that needs to be "cut off" to participate in her class.

In this section, data were presented to show how Sara embodied aspects of her accumulated knowledge into her classroom practices. Sara used her nuanced knowledge of language and past teaching experiences to create a "menu of scaffolds" for both ELL and AAL speaking students, rather than a broad and simplistic application of bilingual methods. She scaffolded options for students in writing, group work, in learning academic vocabulary, and also incorporated the use of visuals/multi-media techniques. Sara also enacted her view of language/culture as integral to identity in a sociopolitical unit I observed. Sara's "two part" view of race informed her selection of multicultural literature circle books representative of her students, as well as her explicit instruction on issues like institutional racism, White privilege, etc., through the use of Adichie's "Danger of a Single Story," and Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Ultimately, Sara was

interested in “buffer[ing]” her students’ racial identities from the “larger cultural context.” She provided space within her classroom for who they were, by not requiring them to “cut off” parts of their identity. This was especially evident in one of Sara’s students, Kiwane, who did not need to “cut off” his intellect, past and current experiences, and use of AAL to be the “lead student” in her class. In all these ways, we see *Sara* and her knowledge, as the central driving force behind her pedagogical decision-making, and the embodied toolkit for her classroom. The next section explores Raniya as an embodied toolkit.

### **Raniya as an Embodied Toolkit**

Two large themes I would like to highlight of Raniya’s accumulated knowledge in this chapter are: her extensive knowledge of language acquisition, and her attunement toward those from culturally/linguistically non-mainstream backgrounds. Based on her understanding that language acquisition is an interactive, social process, Raniya held a fluid view of language, in which people existed on a spectrum. These notions of language played out as she advocated for AAL-speaking students in school-wide language assessments, and also assessments in her own classroom. In her varied academic and professional experiences, Raniya often considered the needs and feelings of her ELL and AAL speaking students. Pedagogical ideas ascertained from the “out-of-the-box” experiences (mentioned in chapter five), such as the use of visuals and hand gestures, are incorporated into her instructional practices. The data highlighted in this chapter comes from my initial and follow-up interviews, as well as classroom observations of Raniya.

**Fluid view of language learners.** In the previous chapter, we saw hints of Raniya's fluid view of language. In describing her own linguistic background, she positioned herself as a "mixed" AAL-speaker, revealing her view that people can have varying proficiencies of a language, versus a dichotomous view that you either are or are not an AAL-speaker. This fluid view of language also appeared when she shared about her "out-of-the-box" experience and considered the cultural and linguistic difficulties her students from within and outside the United States might experience. From those comments, we saw her understanding that linguistic diversity does not only stem from those speaking another language, but also those with language variations within the country. In this way, Raniya views both ELL students and those speaking variations of English on a language spectrum. Embedded in her fluid notions of language is an understanding that language acquisition is a socialization process. The idea of both ELL and AAL speaking students sitting on the same language spectrum is more clearly articulated in data that follow.

During a follow-up interview, Raniya and I discussed how her teaching has changed over the years. Below, Raniya shares how her learning has shifted her practices. She also talks about how bilingual methods can be helpful for all linguistically diverse students.

Raniya: ...I've changed a lot...in theory and thinking about things and... adding to what I do. Just being more conscientious about having ...overall... understanding ...a lot of people, they think that "oh, well ESL is...this foreign thing that...I don't need to know much about that," but ...if you have students that are either...AAVE speakers, or Spanish speakers, ...any other language other



than English too, it's just things that you should be aware of....to make ...the information you are relaying to them accessible, so that they can understand, so they can be educated...but they don't...understand that broad ... concept. And I haven't understood it ... totally, where I can actually...try to relay it to somebody else...I'm... taking classes...see the workings of how everything... works together...

We see here that Raniya constructs AAL and Spanish speakers similarly, and not, like others who perceive of those speaking a different language as a “foreign thing.” In the next examples, we will see how she positions both speakers on a continuum of language learning. It is important to note that Raniya says that she has not “understood it...totally,” and is still in the process of learning more ideas about language and learning through coursework. The notion that all teachers are on a journey towards deeper knowledge is an idea that I will return to in the next chapter.

Raniya first clearly articulated her notion of students existing on a language spectrum when she informed me about a case study she conducted on one of her students for a graduate linguistics course. The student came from a biracial, bilingual family. Outside of school, her time was divided between her mother, who was African American, and her father, who was Latino and mostly spoke Spanish. The project entailed audio-recording this student throughout the school day, as well as transcribing and analyzing her language. The student received speech and language services, and Raniya commented that, “we noticed delays in both [Spanish and English] languages.” Raniya stated that part of the project was about, “figuring out which language” the student was “dominant in.” Raniya also sought to consider “the way she [the student] is learning

language and using it and acquiring the language to be able to communicate, in across the settings, ... in the classroom.” In her attempts to understand the student’s languages, Raniya drew on ideas around language acquisition to better decipher the student’s communication in the classroom. In the process of transcribing and analyzing the girl’s language, Raniya found that she “wouldn’t be talking English, but it turns out, she wasn’t talking Spanish either,” and was “making up her own words.” Raniya described the student’s language as being comprised of some Spanish, some English, and some “in her own words.” I asked Raniya if what she learned in her course helped her better understand this student. She responded as follows:

Raniya: oh yes (enthusiastically) ... it just brought who she was as a language learner to light ... Just seeing how complex ... just learning the language. It is ... the process ... they go through, putting together the words and saying what they need to say. ... and then the struggle to communicate. ... sometimes she wouldn’t know what to say, so then she’s like start saying anything (laughs) then you just try to fake it. (Pause) it just kinda brought a lot of things to light about that...

In her response, Raniya links the complexity of understanding this student as a language learner to “the process” of learning to “communicate.” Raniya makes sense of this student within a larger frame of language, a process by which children acquire language. Her description of the student “putting together the words,” is similar to language Raniya used when describing language acquisition (in chapter five). From this data, we see that, inherent in Raniya’s understanding of language learners, is a framework that language is acquired through a “complex” process. These ideas are extended as Raniya considers her

other students, those speaking dialects of English. In the data below, she more fully articulates her notion that ELL and AAL-speaking students sit on a language spectrum.

Raniya: ...And then just helped me also look at my other students, even if they didn't necessarily speak a whole new language, they can be speaking ... a dialect of English ... realizing that they are going to the same kind of changes. ... trying to put together language ... they're somewhere on the language line ... spectrum too, and just figuring out what they're doing with their language, and to take more language samples, and ... just analyzing ... the reasons why they might be saying something certain way. And I think that will help them [students] with those ...standard English conventions ... we grappling over (laughs), And those meanings that we're trying to figure out how children should leave here speaking.

Raniya places both those speaking a “whole new language” and “a dialect of English” on a “language line” and “spectrum,” in which they are undergoing “the same kind of changes.” In the previous data excerpt, Raniya interpreted the complexity of language learning for a bilingual student. Here, she applies this same process to dialect speakers. Undergirding her view of language learners, whether it be for a different language or dialect, is the notion of how one comes to acquire language at all. A fluid view of language, with all students on a language spectrum, is steeped in her knowledge of language acquisition. While she does not explicitly reference AAL-speakers, her last statement about “them with those...standard English conventions” is in reference to a debate among her staff about language assessment of AAL-speaking students (which will be fully detailed in the next section). The above data, then, serves as an effective transition to consider how Raniya’s notions of language underpin her view of language

assessment, in her own classroom (“take more language samples”) and school-wide (“figure out how children should leave here speaking”).

**Advocate for AAL-speakers in school-wide assessment.** Viewing Raniya as an embodied toolkit means understanding her actions and choices as an enactment of who she is, which is inseparable to what she knows. As previously discussed, embedded in her fluid view of language is an extensive knowledge of language acquisition. This section focuses on how Raniya enacts such knowledge as she advocates for AAL-speaking students in school-wide language assessments. Raniya explained that this end-of-year assessment (HELP testing, pseudonym) conducted on all on students in her school measured, “fine motor ability,” “gross motor,” “self-help skills,” and “social language and communication.” The following image entitled “Scoring Summary” shows all the domains assessed.

Figure 13. HELP testing scoring rubric.

<b>Scoring Summary</b>				
<b>Fine Motor Domain</b>				
	Test Date	_____	_____	_____
Results	Total Domain Raw Score	_____	_____	_____
	Total Domain Score Possible	<u>28</u>	<u>28</u>	<u>28</u>
	Domain Percent Score	_____	_____	_____
<b>Gross Motor Domain</b>				
	Test Date	_____	_____	_____
Results	Total Domain Raw Score	_____	_____	_____
	Total Domain Score Possible	<u>36</u>	<u>36</u>	<u>36</u>
	Domain Percent Score	_____	_____	_____
<b>Adaptive Domain</b>				
	Test Date	_____	_____	_____
Results	Total Domain Raw Score	_____	_____	_____
	Total Domain Score Possible	<u>70</u>	<u>70</u>	<u>70</u>
	Domain Percent Score	_____	_____	_____
<b>Cognitive Domain</b>				
	Test Date	_____	_____	_____
Results	Total Domain Raw Score	_____	_____	_____
	Total Domain Score Possible	<u>186</u>	<u>186</u>	<u>186</u>
	Domain Percent Score	_____	_____	_____
<b>Social-Communication Domain</b>				
	Test Date	_____	_____	_____
Results	Total Domain Raw Score	_____	_____	_____
	Total Domain Score Possible	<u>74</u>	<u>74</u>	<u>74</u>
	Domain Percent Score	_____	_____	_____
<b>Social Domain</b>				
	Test Date	_____	_____	_____
Results	Total Domain Raw Score	_____	_____	_____
	Total Domain Score Possible	<u>66</u>	<u>66</u>	<u>66</u>
	Domain Percent Score	_____	_____	_____

The bottom right corner of the image captures the percentages students needed to score, in order to be considered proficient in a particular domain. Notice that the only domain in which teachers expected students to be 100% proficient in by the time they left their program was in the “social communication” domain, an area Raniya described as “the biggest area of struggle” for their “population” of students. To expect students to consistently meet all the objectives was a result, as Raniya explained it, of teachers on a “mission...to get these kids talkin’ right.” The image below displays all the objectives students were expected to meet on a consistent basis, in order to be considered proficient in the “social communication” domain. Each column with an asterisk (G3 is the exception in this domain) is organized in a way that positions the easiest objective at the bottom, and progressively becomes more difficult, making the objective on the top, encompassing all those below it. For example, under column G2, the objective “uses possessive and plural nouns,” encompasses the objectives below it, “uses possessive” and “uses plural nouns.”

Figure 14. HELP testing social communication domain.

# Social Communication

## Strand A

### SOCIAL-COMMUNICATIVE INTERACTION

G1*	G2*	G3
<div> <div> Informs, directs, asks questions, and expresses anticipation, imagination, affect, and emotions. </div> <div> Expresses anticipated outcomes. </div> <div> Describes pretend objects, events, or people. </div> </div>	<div> <div> Uses conversational rules. </div> <div> Alternates between speaker/listener role. </div> <div> Responds to topic changes initiated by others. </div> </div>	<div> Establishes and varies social communication roles. </div> <div> Varies voice to impart meaning. </div>
<div> <div> Labels own or others' affect/emotions. </div> <div> Describes past events. </div> <div> Makes commands and requests of others. </div> </div>	<div> <div> Asks questions for clarification. </div> <div> Responds to questions related to topic. </div> <div> Maintains topic. </div> </div>	<div> Uses socially appropriate physical orientation (eye contact, distance from conversational partner). </div>
<div> <div> Obtains information. </div> <div> Informs. </div> </div>	<div> Responds to others' topic initiations. </div>	

## Strand B

### PRODUCTION OF WORDS, PHRASES, AND SENTENCES

G1*	G2*	G3*	G4*	G5*
<div> <div> Uses verbs. </div> <div> Shows agreement between nouns and verbs (I go, He goes). </div> <div> Uses past tense verbs (He jumped, I ate). </div> <div> Uses present progressive "ing" (He is running). </div> </div>	<div> <div> Uses possessive and plural nouns. </div> <div> Uses possessive "s" (Its', Mom's hat). </div> <div> Uses plural nouns (dogs, dishes, mice) </div> </div>	<div> <div> Asks questions </div> <div> Asks yes/no questions (Can I have one?). </div> <div> Asks "wh" questions </div> <div> Asks questions using rising inflection. </div> </div>	<div> <div> Uses pronouns. </div> <div> Uses subject pronouns (I, he, she). </div> <div> Uses possessive pronouns (my, mine). </div> </div>	<div> <div> Uses complete sentences. </div> <div> Uses adjectives to make comparisons. </div> <div> Uses adverbs. </div> <div> Uses prepositions. </div> <div> Uses conjunctions. </div> <div> Uses articles. </div> </div>

**Comments:**

In the following examples, I describe staff debates around assessing AAL-speaking students, as told by Raniya. She informed me that the staff discussed, box by box, which objectives they felt students needed to show, in order to be considered proficient. The 100% in figure --- for this domain meant that the staff decided to expect students to meet

100% of the objectives to be considered proficient for this domain. This first data excerpt reveals that this goal was intended to address those speaking AAL.

Raniya: ... So we would rate them, ... because it dealt with grammar and ... *syntax*, pronouns, and proper use of speech and everything. And so we [Raniya's staff] would have talks about, ... the African Americans, ... lots of times they speak in this way disqualifies them meeting the objectives of saying, meeting those language objectives ... so we would have ... conversations. The people on the staff that were really good with that --, she's been a part of our ... staff for a while. With her background, ... [with] linguistics, ... she would be the one to educate ... well it's not a bad, ... but I know this tool [HELP testing] is saying you need to form this sentence, but ... culture in their own linguistic background count, ... their home, and basically how they speak at home, with their family, ...

From this data, we learn that Raniya's staff perceives "African Americans" to speak in a way that "disqualifies them from meeting the objectives" in the HELP assessment.

Raniya describes a staff member who attempted to educate staff about how students' "linguistic background," such as the language spoken "at home" and with "family," should "count." I asked Raniya if the staff accepted the views of this staff member who argued for the validation of student home language.

Raniya: I don't think so [laughs], I don't think so. And that's only because ... the response was ... eventually they're going to be interviewing and if they don't know how to speak in this way then they're going to be at a disadvantage and ... this is school, school language is different from home. ... comments ... like that. ... they weren't buying into [laughs] things like that...



Staff members' rejection of student home language was based on deficit notions of AAL being a "disadvantage" for future employment, and not appropriate for "school language." In data presented later in this section, we see the staff holding an expectation for all students to meet the goals of all the boxes in Table – in order to be considered "proficient." The evaluation by staff members to view AAL through a deficit lens, as well as holding students to such standards in assessment reveals an inherent view of their own positioning, and assumptions about the correctness of their own language. In chapter two, I discuss the dialect of some White dialects, though these are not the extent to which Whites often vary in LWC, and can be grammatically erroneous at times. For example, some Whites will say, "her and I," which is the syntactically incorrect way of saying, "she and I." Deficit views of AAL and the speakers of the language held by some Whites are often with the assumption that Whites do not speak a vernacular of English, and their immunity to syntactic error is embedded within their race. These restrictive views of language, as Raniya informed me in the data above, resulted in lower HELP test scores for students who spoke variations of English (e.g., dropped an 's' in a word). The issues of assessing AAL-speaking students again resurfaced when the school switched from HELP testing to FLEX assessments. According to Raniya, the difference in FLEX assessment was that it did not "stress" aspects like, "the parts of speech and the structure of the sentences so much." She explained how the staff received training for the new assessment, and the issue of how to "rate" AAL-speakers again resurfaced.

Raniya: ...they [staff] kinda wanted to know, ... just learning the tool and asking, "we know how we're rating, so we're rating our students the same way when it comes to language development." And it was "if they're not using the proper

verbs and they're not putting their sentences like this, do they get marked down or where would they be?" So she [FLEX assessment trainer] was just trying to give them [the staff] an answer, but they weren't really accepting the answer—it's okay if they're not putting their sentences perfectly. It's more about them relaying their message--Is there message being put across where someone can actually understand what they're saying versus whether they're putting all their parts of speech together to put a standard English type of sentence. So, I kinda spoke up and explained it my way ... As long as you're understanding, they're able to communicate. Communication is the bigger picture versus them being able to structure sentences in such a way that's ... standard English, ... proper English.

Given the new assessment's focus on students "relaying their message," and not on forming "parts of speech together" in order to produce "a standard English type of sentence," we see the staff resistant to those they perceive as using varied sentence structures and not "proper verbs." Raniya also advocated for AAL-speaking students by encouraging her colleagues to consider "communication" as "the bigger picture." I asked Raniya if students, under the new FLEX assessment, are still receiving lower scores as a result of speaking AAL. Her response was as follows:

Raniya: at least they shouldn't be [laughs]. ... we continually take language samples. I think the FLEX language assessment is more ... subjective to teacher opinion in a way, ... so it's not very black and white, cut and dry. ... it gives some room for teachers to say some sentences just aren't up to par, ... but it's more flexible.

Even though, according to the FLEX trainer above, the new assessment was intended to examine student language on content of communication rather than on syntax, teachers with deficit views of AAL had the flexibility to be judge a sentence as not “up to par.” Later, in the interview, Raniya recapped the purpose of her staff conversations about assessing student language and shared what they had decided.

Raniya: ... that was pretty much the goal of the conversation ... what kind of speakers do we want them to leave as, ... what amount of proficiency in language ... and spoken language do you want them to leave? And so we ... have to kind of come up with measuring bar ... measuring how they're correctly putting these sentences together, and saying this is proficient, whereas this is deficient (laughs) this is not good ...

Alice: ...did you guys end up coming up with those measures?

Raniya: yeah we did (laughs), and I disagreed. 'Cause they said, ... they're just low in a lot of different areas ... (Laughs) ... they said 100%, like everything on there they [teachers] felt that they [students] should be able to do ... but there's like different parts of what speaking in a complete sentence is. (1417) You gotta have this part, and this part and this part. You've got to be able to look at the speaker and have to, you know ... So they said 100% (laughing). I don't think too many people, well, some of my kids did get to 100%, because they did speak ... in proper English, and they were proficient in that, but a lot of them probably didn't (laughs).

In this data, we see a stark contrast between Raniya's fluid view of language, which understands “proficiency” in the ability to speak “different parts” of a sentence, and her

staff's dichotomous view that students are either 100% proficient, or not at all. I interpret Raniya's disagreement as a form of advocacy for her students who do not speak 100% "proper English." Her reasoning, that there are various parts of a "complete sentence," harkens again to her knowledge that language acquisition is a process.

**Raniya's use of assessment.** In a follow-up interview, Raniya discussed with me how she perceived students being able to speak AAL as a "strength." In our discussion about her students' language and learning, I recalled her mention of other staff members who failed to recognize students' home language.

R: ...I see it as a strength...of theirs. Because they can communicate ... across more settings... Whereas somebody who doesn't have that flexibility in language...whereas one teacher ... "oh, they'll be more flexible if they learned the standard..." versus ...it's also a strength to ...be immersed in their home language too..."

We see Raniya's view of students' "home language" as a "strength" because they have the "flexibility" to speak "across more settings." This view of student home language as a "strength," in conjunction with her understanding that language learners exist on a spectrum, is manifested in the way Raniya chooses to assess her students in the classroom.

In previous data, Raniya mentioned taking language samples as part of HELP and FLEX assessments, but also as something she wanted to do more of after completing the case study project on her bilingual student. Upon entering her classroom, I discovered Raniya kept a "language clipboard" that held a large index card for each student she taught. The clipboard served as a way to document student language over time. She told me that she would listen for the length of utterances, complexity of word choice, the

setting in which children were speaking, and participants involved in the speech event. Raniya told me she would “just write what they say,” and “try to have it just as much as I possibly can.” It was important for Raniya to capture students’ words, as we will see in examples that follow. She would then input some of these samples into the FLEX assessment online, to provide evidence of student growth in language development. The image below is a picture of Raniya’s language clipboard.

The image shows two clipboards with purple star-shaped labels. The left clipboard has a label that says "Language Samples" and a note that reads: "11/14 'They Gave Herd' (birds at mother's milk table) If a fly gets on your face, you have to stop them. A lot which is a baseball bat (spongy) And a golf club too (ten - some) We're having a party (we have been eating milk, and eggs and chocolate) (at my house) We're ten years old. We're the whole herd. I know what Alice's gallery is. It's called by Fula's Fred's, the whole herd." The right clipboard has a label that says "Small Group Checklist" and a note that reads: "Waffles" are better than "Cakes" (referring to another student) I need to do this (color on paper) Look at my teacher? Look at my picture? What? That's a cricket? (referring to a question about a cricket book) I've put everything at my morning house. (on a play table) Has "Can you spot this?" at a snack pot (referring to a game).

The following is an instance in which Raniya used her language clipboard to document a student's language. The event occurred during snack time, in which students were eating pineapples and chocolate milk. Raniya walked to the table, and began talking to a table of students about their snack. The data below documents Raniya talking to John, a White boy, who described how chocolate milk was made.

Raniya: ...hold on, hold on, I want John to tell me

John: um, you put your chocolate (pronounced doclate) stuff in it

Raniya: okay

John: and then (pause) you, ah, put milk in it, and then, this is the last word. Then (elongated), stir it up with a spoon...

Raniya: okay, so first, I'm writing your words down, when you said ...I first ...put the chocolate stuff in it, then you put milk in it, and then what else? ...

John: ...chocolate stuff in it

Raniya: yep, I got that part. And then you put milk in it, and you said something about stirring it...okay, so what do you do with the spoon?

John: ...stir it and get the chocolate up

Raniya: stir it and get the chocolate up? ... Oh ok (giggles)

We see that Raniya documented John in a natural context, and is careful to document the words John had stated. These types of events, documented on her language clipboard, are then transferred to the FLEX assessment online. This assessment functions more like a portfolio, since it provides snapshots of student learning throughout the year. For each artifact, Raniya decides which objectives apply to that particular artifact, and rates how the student performs for the given activity.

The next two examples are language samples Raniya transferred from her language clipboard and input into the FLEX assessment online. The language samples come from a student, Jayda (pseudonym) who was in Raniya's class for two consecutive years (the early childhood program enrolls students from age 3-5). While Jayda was in the class during the semester I observed Raniya (Spring 2015), the language sample documented below was from the semester before my observations. Since FLEX testing serves as a portfolio of artifacts over the entire time of the program, Raniya was able to share language samples she had taken at various times. Jayda is an African American girl, and at the time of my observations, was four years old. I noticed, and Raniya confirmed, that Jayda switched between AAL and LWC.

Figure 16. Jayda FLEX testing language sample.

**General Documentation for Jayda**  
**September 24, 2013**

**Language Sample:**  
"I got 2 glasses." (Teacher responds by asking - Do you need 2 glasses?) "YES."  
"We finna go to the store. You gonna come? You done?" (At pretend center with)

**Associated Dimensions & Levels | September 24, 2013**

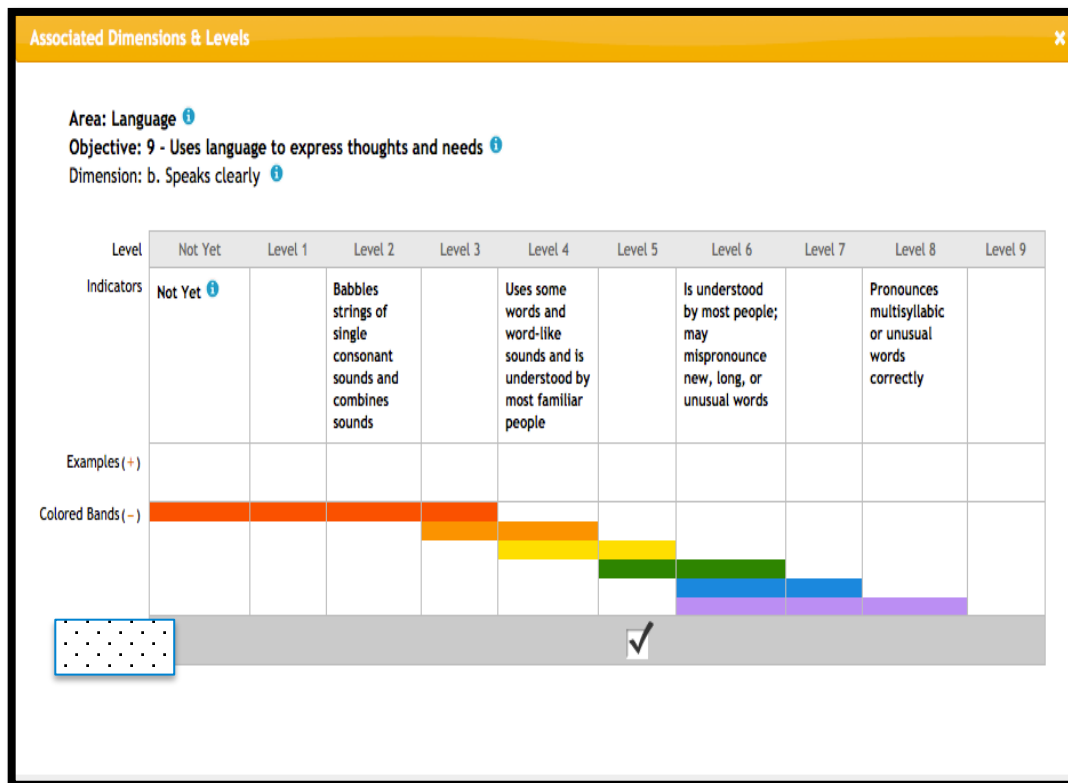
**D**

- ✓ 2a. Forms relationships with adults **i**
- ✓ 2c. Interacts with peers **i**
- ✓ 3a. Balances needs and rights of self and others **i**
- ✓ 9b. Speaks clearly **i**
- ✓ 9c. Uses conventional grammar **i**
- ✓ 20b. Quantifies **i**



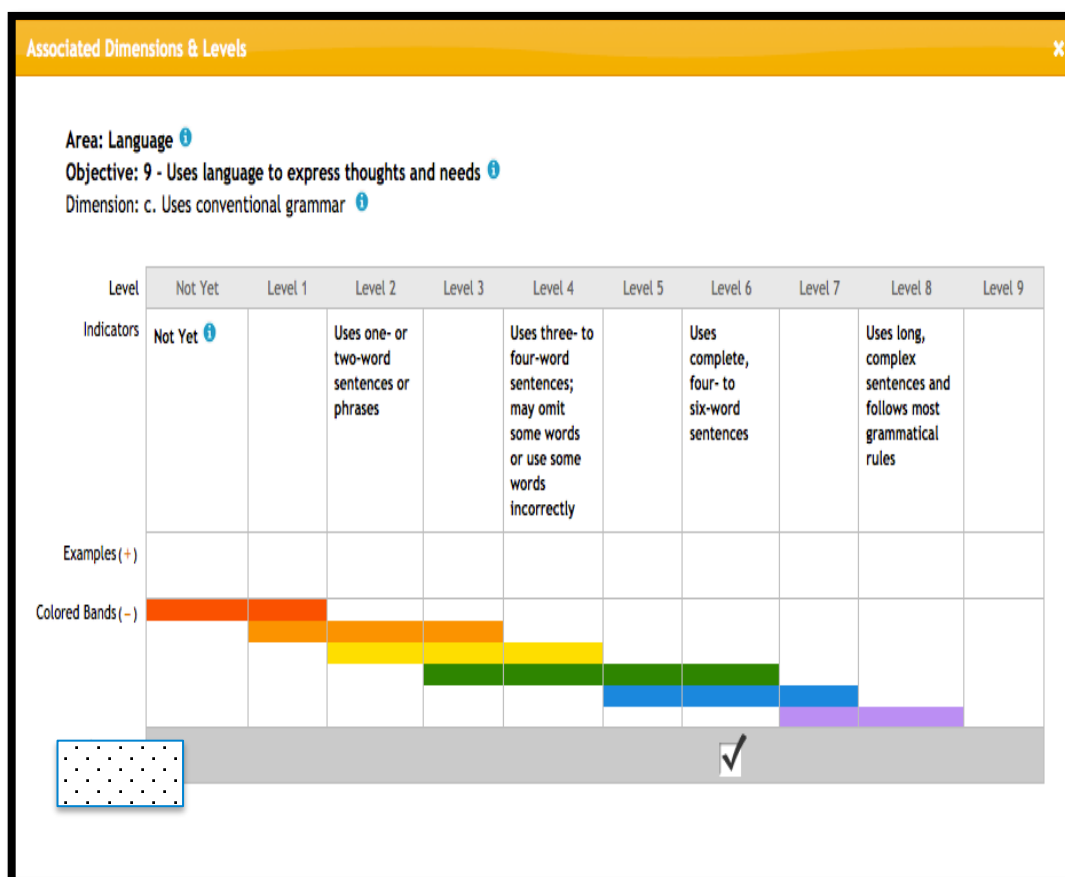
From this record, we see that Raniya has documented Jayda's words, as well as her usage of AAL, "we finna," "you gonna," and "you done?". Raniya also contextualizes the sample with the setting (pretend center) and whom Jayda is talking to. Underneath the language sample are the objectives Raniya selected to apply to this artifact. For this sample, she applied two language objectives, "speaks clearly," and "uses conventional grammar." The rainbow-colored box icon to the left of each objective signifies how Raniya scored each objective. When clicked, the following images appear, corresponding each objective

Figure 17. Jayda FLEX testing: speaks clearly objective.



The colors bands represent the developmental level, as determined by FLEX testing, by age of the child. Red means “birth to 1 year,” orange is for “1-2 years,” yellow is “2-3 years,” green means “preschool 3 class,” blue represents “pre-K 4 class,” and purple stands for “kindergarten.” Raniya told me that teachers aim to move students to the “purple” area by the time they exit the program at age five. Notice that the indicators for this objective (e.g., “uses some words and word-like sounds and is understood by most familiar people”) are not focused on students speaking a particular way, as was previously mentioned by Raniya, but instead emphasize being “understood.” For this objective, Raniya has scored Jayda at level 5, which is relatively on target for her age. We can see, however, if a teacher is unfamiliar or refuses to accept AAL, how a different might have scored this language sample at a level 3 or 4. For the next objective, “Uses language to express thoughts and needs,” Raniya scored Jayda at a level 6.

Figure 18. Jayda FLEX testing: uses language to express thoughts and needs objective.



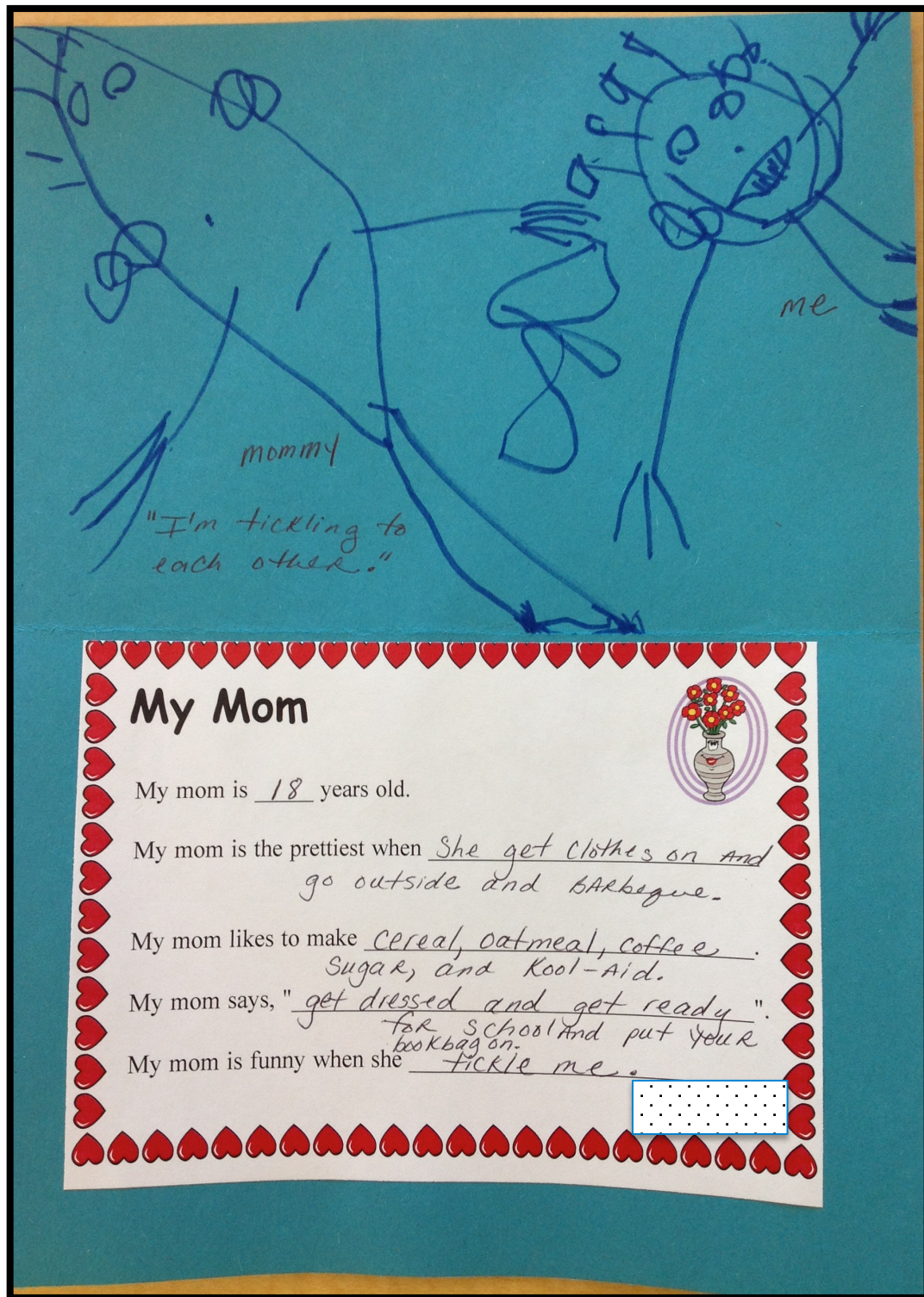
The indicator for level 6 requires students to “complete four-to-six-word sentences.” In order for Raniya to give Jayda this score, she had to consider Jayda’s statement “We finna go to the store,” since all her other statements are four words or less. A different teacher, who might not consider “finna” a word, or perhaps an “incorrect” use of a word, could have marked this same language sample as level 4. We see, then, how Raniya’s view and knowledge of language shaped how she assessed Jayda in her own classroom.

**Attunement of linguistic diversity in instructional practices.** A recurring theme for Raniya, through her graduate coursework, in her personal experiences, and from her professional life, is an attention towards culturally and linguistically diverse students. This attunement for those from diverse backgrounds plays a salient role in her instructional practices, as will be demonstrated in proceeding data surrounding her early writing practices and use of visuals/hand gestures. It is not uncommon, however, for many early childhood classrooms to be filled with visuals and the use hand gestures/body movement to communicate with children. Raniya had, after all, informed me that she and other early childhood teachers at her school considered themselves to be students’ “first teachers of language.” She had also mentioned that her knowledge about using “hand movements,” “cues,” and “props,” were practices she already incorporated as an early childhood teacher, prior to graduate coursework. The goal of this section, therefore, is not to portray Raniya’s practices as completely different from other teachers or to draw a linear relationship between one life experience to a particular instructional practice; overlaps may occur. Rather, I aim to draw a connection between Raniya’s knowledge of language, as told by her and through my interpretations, with her classroom practices.

This connection underscores how practices, particularly related to linguistic diversity that may not occur in others' classrooms, come to fruition in the first place. In previous chapters, I document Raniya's attunement toward Black students, as she learned about the treatment of Black students and their families in schools, and also the lack of acknowledgement/acceptance of AAL as legitimate. We also learned of Raniya's attunement for culturally/linguistically diverse students (from both domestic and international origins) through her "out-of-the-box" course assignments. As has been asserted, these experiences contributed to her accumulated knowledge. In the following subsections, I document how Raniya enacts her knowledge in various instructional practices.

*Honoring AAL in student voice.* Raniya not only honored AAL in her use of assessment, but also as she incorporated student voice in various activities. An example of this was an activity Raniya planned to help celebrate Mother's day. She asked students to draw pictures related to their mothers, and then conferenced with them, one at a time, to complete the "My Mom" poem card, as shown below.

Figure 19. Jayda "My Mom" poem.



During these conferences, Raniya inquired students about their drawings, and would label them accordingly. As she listened to the descriptions of their drawings, she would write down sentences students said that captured the main idea. She also had the “My Mom” poem template that was used with each student, for students to share what they thought about their mothers. The cards featured above come from two African American students, one boy and one girl, who flexibly used AAL at times. The fieldnote excerpt below documents Raniya’s conference with Jayda, whose card is featured in the image to the right.

Students are spread out all over the classroom engaged in various centers, and Raniya seats herself at the “office” center to conduct one-on-one conferences with students about their Mother’s day cards. This center is a large rectangular table, off by a corner of the room, providing some distance from other centers (e.g., pretend center, classroom library, etc.). Raniya has Jayda come to the office center and take a seat next to her. Raniya shows her the “My Mom” poem template to Jayda. Raniya then explains how she is going to write down things about her mother and it will eventually become a card. She tells Jayda that the card will be entitled, “My Mom” and completes the first sentence in the poem, “My mom is 18 years old.” Raniya then continues to read the remaining sentences and asks Jayda to finish each sentence. She writes down Jayda’s words as she says them, and tells Jayda to watch as she writes her words down on paper. After the poem is complete, Raniya reads the entire poem back to Jayda, while

showing her that she has written down what Jayda's words, just as she said them.

(fieldnote, May 6, 2014)

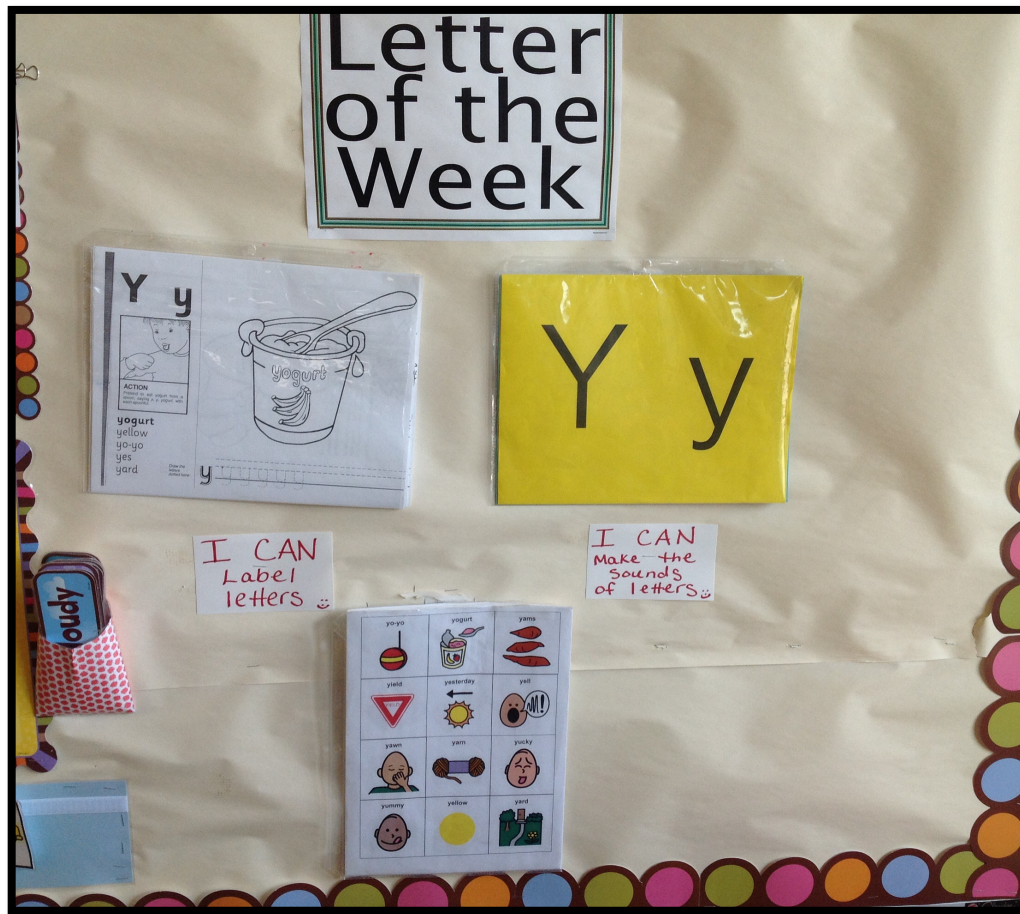
From Raniya's interactions with Jayda, we see Raniya connecting written and oral language as she first explains how she will be writing down what Jayda will say about her mother, and then again, after the poem is complete and Raniya shows how her writing matches what Jayda has said. We also see Raniya's intentional recording of Jayda's words, by placing quotations around her description of the drawing, "I'm tickling to each other," and also in the last sentence of the poem, "My mom is funny when she tickle me." Jayda's contribution to this sentence, "tickle me," is consistent with the AAL grammatical rule of dropping the "s" at the end of some verbs. We also see Jayda flexibly using LWC in the sentence, "My mom says, 'get dressed and get ready for school and put your book bag on.'" By linking oral and written language in this activity, and also documenting Jayda's exact oral language, Raniya honors student use of AAL in early writing.

*Use of visuals/hand gestures for literacy learning.* As previously stated, Raniya's use of visuals in her classroom pedagogy are not only a result of her "out of the box" assignment experiences. The notion of teachers as embodied toolkits is not intended to draw linear relationships between a particular experience and how one acts, but to understand teachers with multi-faceted experiences that shape who they are. While Raniya may have had prior knowledge of using visuals before her graduate coursework, the point is that the "out of the box" experiences did contribute to Raniya's accumulated knowledge, as she specifically named these strategies when talking about this experience. When considering how Raniya uses her accumulated knowledge to enact instructional



practices, it is significant to include these practices, as well as consider the feasibility of teachers having more than one reason for their instructional choices. And while the proceeding examples of Raniya using visuals/hand gestures are not explicitly tied to diverse language learners, we know (based on previous data) that she has this population of students in mind as she uses these strategies. As these next three subsections will show, Raniya's attunement of linguistic diversity played out as she incorporated the use of visuals for varied purposes. The first example is tied to her literacy instruction, in which she taught the letter of the week. The image below shows how Raniya has devoted space on her bulletin board to post visuals about "Letter of the Week." In this lesson, Raniya stood in front of students as they were seated on the rug, by the bathroom. After introducing the letter, she asks students to practice, as will be seen in the excerpt below, while dismissing students two at a time for a bathroom break.

Figure 20. Letter of the week bulletin board.



Raniya: ...This is our letter this week. What letter is it?

(Several kids shout out "V!" ...)

Raniya: Doesn't it make that "v" sound? ... now get...our fingers...let's make it.

Vvvv (making "v" sound and students join in on "v" sound) ... While we are going to the bathroom, we're going to practice...put your hand in the air...magic tools...and write in the air...we're gonna write the letter "V." We're gonna go which direction? ... Down and then up. (Students say "down up" the same time

Raniya says it. Raniya uses her right pointer finger to write V in the air so that

kids can see.)...Just once, because we did the “W” before, and it was down up, down up (using hand to motion again), but we just do it once. One more time, really big. Down up (Using hand motion again, Raniya says with slower speed. Students say “down up” with her as she says it.) ...now our lower case “v,” is it the same? It’s made the same, except for it’s smaller. So let’s go ahead and get our fingers again...go down up (Students say “down up” with her again while they also use their fingers to write the letter in the air too.)...Now we’re gonna write “V” on our friends’ backs, okay? Let’s see who’s ready to write on our friend’s back...(calls on students’ names, a boy and a girl)...alright, you ready to write “V” on her back? (Raniya says to the boy whom she called on) Okay, get your finger. It’s not going to tickle, it’s okay. Go down up. (He “writes” the letter “V” on her back with his finger.) Very good, now you get to do him. Write the letter V. (She “writes” the letter “V” on his back with her finger.) Excellent! You two may go potty... (fieldnote and audio-record, April 24, 2014)

We see that Raniya pairs hand gestures with the introduction of the letter “v.” She has students practice “writ[ing] the letter” with their “magic air tools,” and clarifies how this letter is different from “W,” since it only has one “down up.” She again has students practice writing the letter on other students’ backs. The use of hand motions is present throughout the lesson, and in this way, provides multiple opportunities for all students on the language spectrum to learn this letter.

***Use of visuals/hand gestures in a scripted lesson.*** Raniya also used visuals and hand gestures during a social skills lesson, in a district-adopted curriculum. The image below is the lesson Raniya used to instruct students on problem-resolution.

Figure 21. Social skills scripted curriculum.

## Week 23: Saying the Problem

**Early Learning**  
Unit 4

**Concepts**

- You need to calm down before you solve a problem.
- The first Problem-Solving Step is to use words to say the problem.

**Key Words**  
Problem, words, safe

**Objectives**  
Children will be able to:

- Demonstrate calming down and saying the problem.
- Use words to describe problems presented in scenarios.

**Why This Theme Matters**  
Skilled problem solvers get along better with other children and have fewer conflicts and problems with aggression.

**Teaching Notes**  
Children need to calm down strong feelings before solving problems. Young children need the support of an adult as they learn how to solve problems with others. They need help using words to describe the problem. Model describing problems in a non-blaming way.

**Using Skills Every Day**  
Have children THINK AHEAD to when they can use words to say a problem.  
Notice when children use words to describe a problem, and REINFORCE their behavior with specific feedback: I heard you use your words to tell Leo the problem is that you both want to wear the same dress-up cape.

- Model describing problems out loud.
- Remind children to calm down strong feelings and then use words to describe the problem.

Have children THINK BACK to when they used words to say a problem.

Go online to [www.secondstep.org](http://www.secondstep.org) for Weekly Theme resources and videos.

**secondSTEP**

**Day 1: Puppet Script**  
**Materials:** Girl puppet

Teacher: Last week you learned how to join in when other children are playing. You learned to offer a play idea and then ask to join in with a friendly voice. Let's see what \_\_\_\_\_ (Girl puppet) is doing today.

Girl (a little frustrated): Oh, where is it? I can't find it!

Teacher: It sounds like you have a problem.

Girl (loudly): It's gone! Baby can't go to sleep.

Teacher (to children): It sounds like Girl is frustrated and needs to calm down. What can she do to calm down?

Give think-time. Call on one or two children at random. (Take belly breaths.)

Teacher (to Girl): Okay, take some belly breaths to calm down. Girl breathes. Now you're calm. Use your words to tell me what the problem is.

Girl: I'm trying to put the baby to bed for a nap. But I can't find the baby's blanket anywhere. I looked and looked.

Teacher: You've just used your words to tell me the problem. Saying the problem is the first step for solving a problem.

Girl: Will you help me find a blanket for my doll?

Teacher: You asked for help in a calm, respectful voice. So it was easy for me to understand you. Now let's see if we can find a blanket for the baby doll.


Teach and sing Verses 1 and 2 of "When You Have a Problem" (Track 26 of the Join In and Sing CD). Lyrics are in the Teaching Materials Notebook. Sing the song again during the week.

Play the Partner Pause game from the Teaching Materials Notebook one or more times during the day. The five symbols you'll need to play this game are also in the Teaching Materials Notebook. Photocopy them before you play the game. Continue to play each day this week.

Track 26

**Day 2: Story and Discussion**  
**Materials:** How to Calm Down poster

Yesterday \_\_\_\_\_ (Girl puppet) learned to use words to say what the problem is. What was the problem she had? (She couldn't find the doll's blanket.) Saying the problem is the first step for solving a problem.



Nora      Talik

Show the photo. Ask children what they see, what is happening, and how the children in the photo feel. Point out the story elements. Here are Nora and Talik.

- Is there a problem? Give think-time. (Yes) What clues in the photo tell you there is a problem? (Angry bodies.)

Nora says, "I want to play with it!" She wants to grab the dump truck. Talik says, "Not I got it first." He holds on tightly to the truck.

- Is grabbing a safe thing to do? (No.) Are the children having strong feelings? (Yes.) Both children need to calm down so they can think about the problem. Review the How to Calm Down poster.
- The first step for solving problems is to use your words. Think about how to say what the problem is. Give think-time. Call on one or two children at random. (Both children want to play with the dump truck.) If you had the same idea, wiggle your fingers.
- Pretend you are Nora and Talik. Think of some safe ways to solve the problem. Give think-time. Call on a few children at random. Remind children of the Fair Ways to Play as necessary.

When you have a problem and are having strong feelings, first you need to calm down. Then you say the problem. It's the first Problem-Solving Step.

**Day 3: Skill-Practice Activity 1**  
**Calm Down, Say the Problem** (large group, Objective 1)

- Introduce the activity. Let's play a game about calming down and saying the problem.
- Read the first scenario. Model the following steps and have children copy you: 1) Put your hands on your tummy and say "Stop." 2) Name the feeling. 3) Take belly breaths. 4) Say the problem (from the problem statement in parentheses).
- Repeat these steps with the other scenarios or make up your own.
- Notice and reinforce children's calming-down behaviors.

**Scenarios**

- You can't find your coat. You're very frustrated. (Problem: I lost my coat.)
- Someone got your favorite book before you. You're very angry. (Problem: We both want to read the same book.)
- You spilled paint on your picture. You're very sad. (Problem: There is spilled paint on my picture.)

**Day 4: Skill-Practice Activity 2**  
**Spot the Problem** (small group, Objective 2)  
**Materials:** Girl and Boy puppets

- Have children sit on the floor. You're going to be problem spotters. \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ (Girl and Boy puppets) will tell you a story about a problem they had. You need to spot the problem and say it in words!
- Act out the following puppet script.  
Boy: \_\_\_\_\_ (Girl and I were riding the bikes. I really wanted to ride the blue bike. It's the only blue bike at school.)  
Girl: But I wanted to ride it too. And I got it first!
- Ask: What is the problem? (Both want the blue bike.)
- Ask: How would \_\_\_\_\_ (Girl) feel if \_\_\_\_\_ (Boy) pushed her off the bike and took it?
- Ask: What could they do? (Take turns. Play together.)
- Reinforce saying the problem in words.

**Day 5**  
Read a book related to this week's theme. Go online to [www.secondstep.org](http://www.secondstep.org) for recommended books, resources, and videos.

Send home this week's Home Link from the Teaching Materials Notebook.

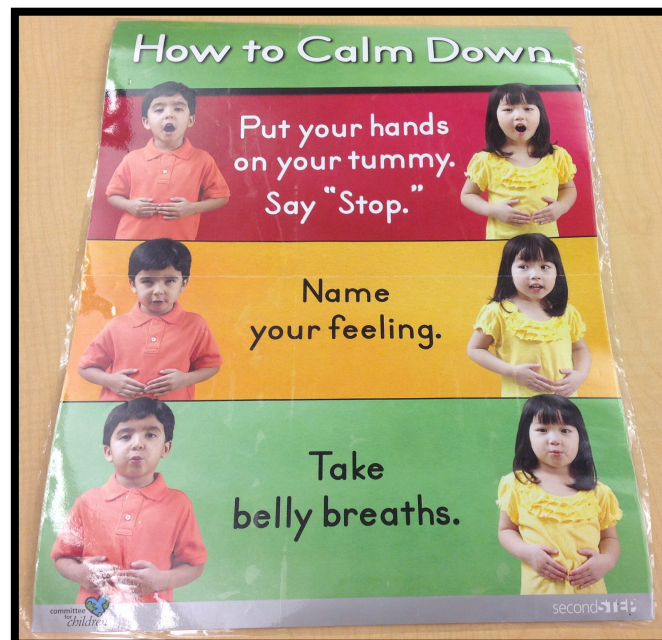
Raniya's lesson follows the instructions in the yellow column, under the heading, "Day 1: Puppet Script." The lesson is formatted as a script between a teacher and girl (represented by a puppet who Raniya has named Clarissa, shown in Figure 24), with some instructions for the teacher to show emotion/action (e.g., frustrated, belly breaths, etc.) in parentheses. The image below Clarissa is a poster about, "How to calm down." Raniya periodically used this poster when conferencing with students who were upset and Raniya felt needed reminders about how to take "belly breaths." Using "belly breaths" is a familiar strategy to student, and reviewed in the following lesson. The proceeding data shows how Raniya enhances this scripted lesson by incorporating hand gestures for students.



Figure 22. Social skills Clarissa puppet.



Figure 23. Belly breaths poster.



I have used the table below to more clearly depict Raniya’s words and corresponding gestures/body motions in the lesson. Clarissa, the girl puppet, is on Raniya’s right hand for the duration, while Raniya uses her left hand to act out or point to parts of her body.

**Table 1. Raniya’s Social Skill Lesson.**

Raniya’s words during social skills lesson	Raniya’s corresponding gestures/ body motions
...So first you do what? Watch.	Creates a circle shape with her left hand, and puts that circle shape around her left eye; goes word “watch.” Some students copy Raniya and put their hands around their eyes too.
And then after you watch for a while, you have an idea,	Uses left pointer finger to point to the left side of her head/temple, goes with word “idea.”
and then you ask to	Uses left pointer finger to point to mouth; goes with word “ask.”
play...	Uses the sign language motion for the word “play”—fist with thumb and pinky finger sticking out, while shaking back and forth.
Well, let’s see what ... Clarissa’s doing. (speaking as if Clarissa) Ooohhh	Eyebrows are furrowed.

**Table 1 (cont.)**

Where is it?! (grunts)	Has Clarissa act out looking for something by moving Clarissa to the right side of her body. Eyebrows are still furrowed.
I can't find it! I can't find it anywhere!	Moves Clarissa around, as she is still
Oh, is it over here? Oh no, I can't find it, ooohh (in whining voice that turns into grunt).	looking, to the left side of her body and then above her head to the right side of her body and behind her. Moves Clarissa back to where she started, to her right side. Eyebrows still furrowed.
(back in a calm voice, speaking as the teacher again) She's feeling how?	Eyebrows no longer furrowed.
(Several students shout out "sad.")	
Not only sad, but Ggrrr (growl-noise).	Eyebrows furrowed again. Crosses Clarissa's arms and making Clarissa shake, as if very angry.
(Students shout out "frustrated!")	
Frustrated, she is frustrated.	Eyebrows furrowed still.
(speaking as if she is Clarissa) It's done! (in louder voice)	Moves Clarissa in front of her and opens Clarissa's mouth wide.



**Table 1 (cont.)**

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Ugh! (in grunt-like voice) My baby can't sleep.	Moving Clarissa around her body to make it look like Clarissa is moving around and screaming.
...Excuse me (back in calm voice, speaking as the teacher).	Bring Clarissa back close to her body, so that Clarissa is facing herself, and it looks like Raniya is talking to Clarissa.
It sounds like you're feeling frustrated.	Moves left hand out, palm up.
You need to calm down.	Raniya uses left hand to point to Clarissa.
So let's help her.	Moves left hand out, palm up.
(A student shouts out "...belly breath")	
...First she needs to stop herself	Uses left hand to fold both Clarissa's arms over Clarissa's stomach.
She needs to say, "Stop." And then what else? "I'm feeling frustrated"...	Moves Clarissa's head as if Clarissa is talking.
...(girl shouts out "belly breath")...	
And then the last thing she does...say it [name of girl who shouts out "belly breath"]. She has to take, I heard you say it (Several students shout out "belly breaths!")	Points to girl who shouts out "belly breaths."

---

**Table 1 (cont.)**

Belly breaths. So let's have her take three belly breaths. Here we go.	Holds three fingers up using left hand.
(Raniya pouts lips and emphasizes three deep breaths.)	Crosses Clarissa's arms so they are crossed over Clarissa's stomach. With left hand, holds up one additional finger with each deep breath. Moves Clarissa's body up and down so it looks like Clarissa is taking deep breaths too.
Very good (in whisper voice)	
(loud sigh) How do you feel now Clarissa?	Sits Clarissa on her lap and leans in to look and talk to Clarissa
(speaking as if she is Clarissa) I feel so much better. Thank you so much for helping me.	Moving Clarissa's head as if Clarissa is talking
...(back to speaking as the teacher) so what is the problem? I see that you're now calm, and you can use your words to tell me what the problem is.	Uses left hand to hold onto Clarissa's hand. Turns in as if speaking to Clarissa. Faces left palm up as she says tells Clarissa to use her words.

**Table 1 (cont.)**

(speaking as if she is Clarissa) Okay, Miss Raniya, I'll tell you. ...I'm trying to put my baby to bed for a nap...and I can't find the baby's blanket anywhere...	Moves Clarissa's head to make it look like she is talking to Raniya
Hmmm, you used your words to tell me what the problem is. Now I can help you to solve the problem...	Faces Clarissa as if talking to her. Opens left palm up while talking to Clarissa. Points to herself when she says "me." Points to Clarissa when she says, "what the problem is."

We see that Raniya uses gestures and body motions in conjunction with her words throughout the lesson. Her hand movements/motions are connected in some way to the words she is saying. Raniya furrows her eyebrows and shakes Clarissa's body to show "frustration," and to contrast how that emotion is different than "sad." She also uses Clarissa to act out body motions too. When talking about "belly breaths," Raniya uses Clarissa to act out what a belly breath looks like. The motions and words are not haphazardly put together, but flow like a story, providing context for what Raniya and Clarissa are saying. In these ways, Raniya uses visuals not only to convey new ideas, but also as way to teach language.

*Use of visuals/hand gestures for behavior management.* Raniya also used visuals for behavior management as well. Later in the lesson, after Raniya addressed various students' behavior on the rug (e.g., shouting out, not listening to others, making noises, etc.), she decided to pause the lesson and talk to students about their behaviors. At this point in the lesson, Clarissa no longer played a role and Raniya had moved to using a large picture. In the following excerpt, she uses the four images (Figures 26-29) below to remind students of her behavioral expectations.

Figure 24. Eyes are watching visual.

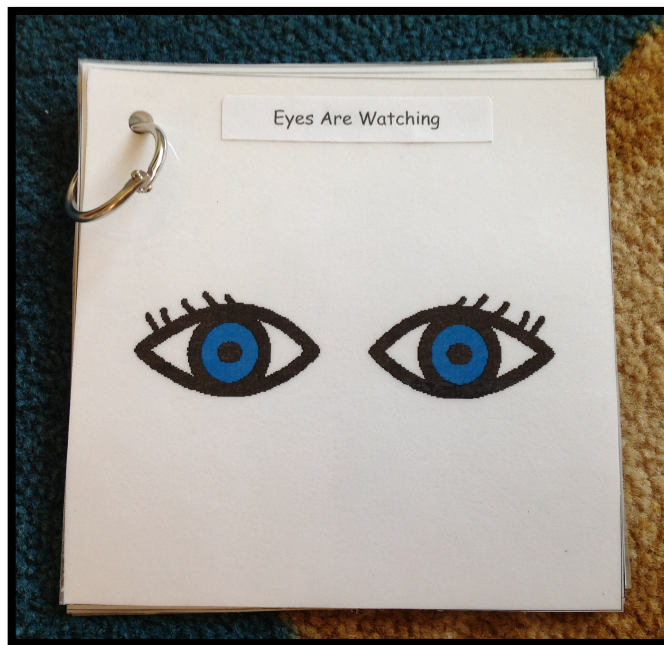


Figure 25. Ears are listening visual.

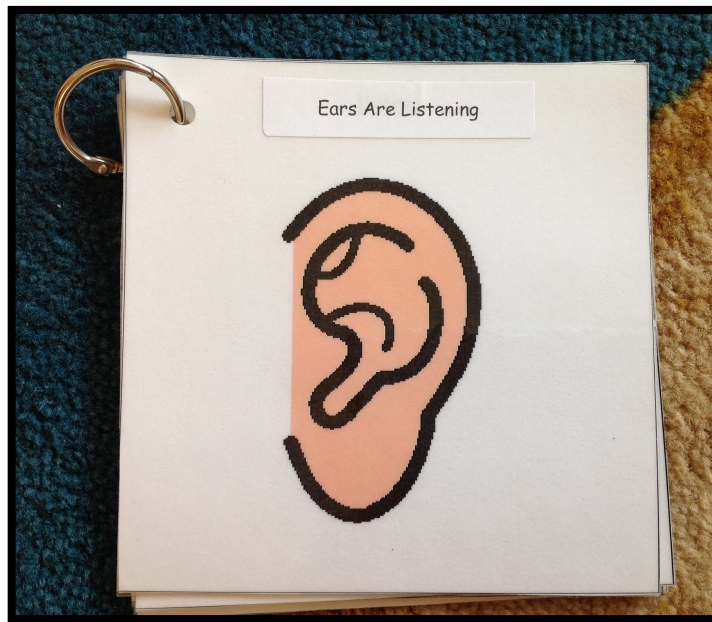


Figure 26. Voices are quiet visual.

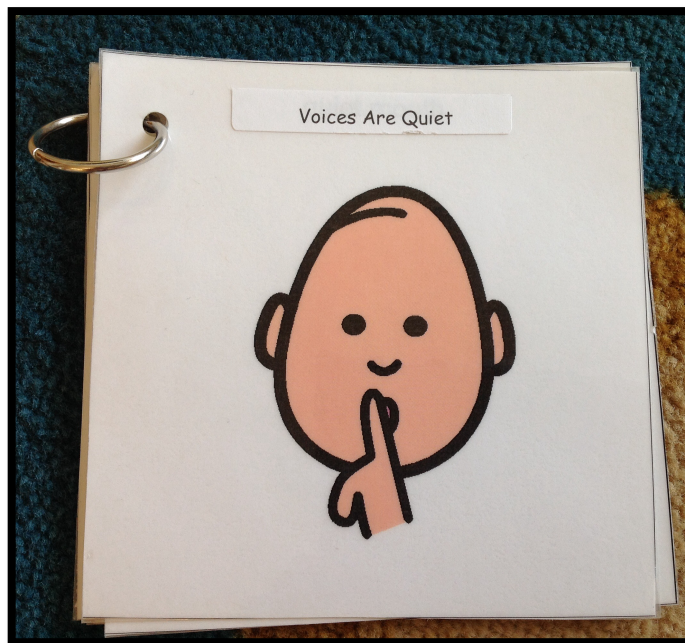
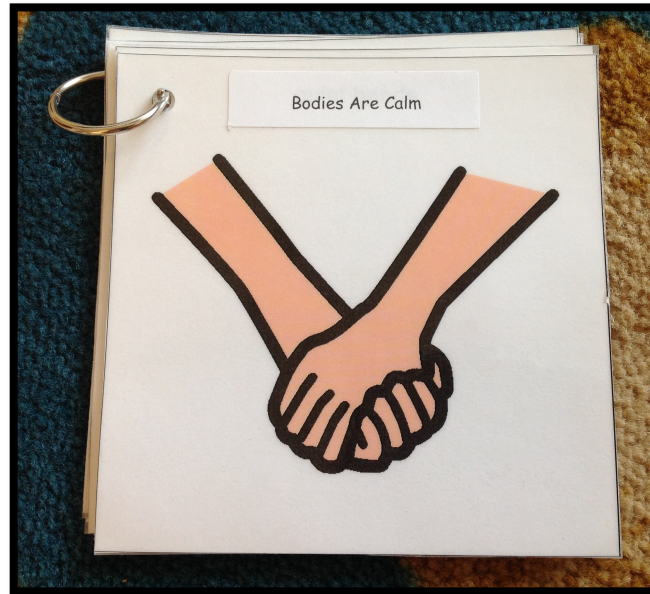


Figure 27. Bodies are calm visual.



Raniya: ...Let's freeze. (Flips to picture of eyes and hold it up for students to see)  
Look at these pictures here. (says in a calm tone) Eyes are watching the picture.  
(Holds up a large picture from the lesson) That's what I'm showing right now.  
(Flips to picture of an ear) Tell me about the next one. (Students make some inaudible comments about ears.) Ears are listening (points to picture of ear) and after we do this, the next person ... who is not (points to picture of ear again) paying attention is going to go out, to a timeout. (still maintaining calm volume and tone) Hear that Jayda? (Flips to picture of person with finger over mouth, and raises pointer finger over her own mouth as well.) Voices are (emphasizes finger over mouth again) quiet, and [name of boy], tell me the last one. (Flips to picture of hands holding. Student says inaudible comment.) Yeah, our hands are in our

laps, so our bodies are calm, not all in our mouths. (motions right hand inward towards herself)...

In addressing student behavior, Raniya again pairs both visual and hand gestures to convey her message. By showing the picture of a person with a finger over his mouth, and then gesturing that same motion on herself, Raniya is communicating with all students her expectations, in a way that is also understandable for those who may not be as familiar with the language she is using.

One large overarching theme for Raniya is the propensity to apply new knowledge toward consideration for her students, especially those from culturally/linguistically non-mainstream backgrounds. It is this theme that runs through her view of language learners, and helps her construct students on a language spectrum. This is rooted in her extensive knowledge of language acquisition as an interactive, social process. Based on these understandings, Raniya is particularly attuned to how her instructional practices and assessment meet the learning needs of those from diverse backgrounds.

### **Tiera as an Embodied Toolkit**

The previous chapter acquainted us with Tiera and aspects of her accumulated knowledge, which was explored through her teaching philosophy. Based on teaching goals she shared with me, I came to organize and name her teaching philosophy with the following tenets: 1) service to others, 2) balancing a “push” to foster one’s “best” and care for that person, in a way that does not 3) shut a child down. From data presented, we saw how Tiera linked her service to children as educating them, with particular interest in those marginalized by race and class. The other tenets address Tiera’s view that students

need to be “pushed” in order for them to achieve their “best”; this, however, must be done in a way that is not “more detrimental than effective” for the students. Tiera’s discussion of being “pushed” included life experiences where she was corrected for AAL-use, or when she received consequences for misbehavior or not meeting certain predetermined standards. This “push,” however, was balanced by her parent’s “nurturing” care for her, and helped her not “shut down.” These key tenets resurfaced throughout my classroom observations and follow-up interviews with Tiera.

I have already discussed how her teaching philosophy was a lived expression comprised of the experiences along her life journey. This is based on the notion that our context shapes us, but that we, too, shape our context, and live out who we are. Tiera’s teaching philosophy, then, is not only shaped by her experiences as an AAL speaker, but also become enacted in her classroom practices related to AAL. In this section, we will explore how Tiera lives out her teaching philosophy through her understanding of AAL in her second grade classroom, and how mutually embedded these entities are to one another.

**Tiera’s positionality and focus.** Unlike Raniya and Sara, my observations of Tiera teaching were in an environment unnatural to most teachers. As is the case for many student teaching experiences, pre-service teachers are assigned to “take over” a classroom that has already been assigned a “real” teacher from the outset of the year, thus making the pre-service teacher “the new person” to the classroom. Professionally, this experience was also Tiera’s first time fully in charge of a classroom. Aside from navigating the dynamics and behavior management that were already set before she arrived, Tiera was also expected to implement the curriculum and instruction of her



cooperating teacher. At times, a pre-service teacher may be allowed to enhance or modify pedagogy, as Tiera did, when permission was granted. Given Tiera's positionality as a pre-service teacher and, essentially, apprentice to her cooperating teacher, much of her embodiment in the classroom was still in process at the time of data collection. The data presented in this section, then, are a mix of her processing how she can accomplish her teaching philosophy in the classroom, and also data from my observations of her as well.

My exploration of Tiera as an embodied toolkit incorporates her interactions with two students, Brendon and Isaiah. Both boys are African American, the only two in her student teaching placement, the main AAL speakers, who flexibly switched between LWC and AAL. I focus on these students primarily because Tiera does, in her conversations with me and in her explanation for how her teaching philosophy is played out. In the data below, Tiera explains why she particularly focuses on these two students.

Alice: ...do you think this idea of pushing your students to be the best they can be without having them shut down...how do you think that...influences...your approach then with your students, or even particular students...?

Tiera: ...I try not to ...(pause and sigh)...spend more time with Brendon and Isaiah, but honestly, they need the most help. ...as far as ... their support at home. They have ...fantastic parents, but they have parents that have ...jobs where they're not able to ... spend two hours...and do homework with you. They (Brendon and Isaiah) have those parents where it's just like, "I have to go to work so maybe I can fit in thirty minutes, and I want to be there for you, but I can't. It's either be there or get food"... Since I see that they don't have their support

system ...it's almost like I'm obligated to step in...I'm obligated as a whole to help my kids ...if they need it at all, but I feel like, particularly them, ...I'm obligated. I can't let those two, particularly, fail. Not on my watch. And I make sure that I don't spend too much time with them because ... still thirteen other kids there, but it's like ...I feel obligated to help those thirteen other kids for a different reason.

Tiera views Brendon and Isaiah's parents as "fantastic" and working hard to provide for their families, but lacking the "support system" these students need, "two hours...[to] do homework," to academically perform in a second grade "gifted" classroom. From previous data, we know that Tiera is interested in educating diverse and marginalized populations, who are also "high need." In her analysis of her class, "as a whole," she again uses "need" as a way to assess how "obligated" she is to particular students. In assessing her class "as a whole," she says she is willing "to help...if they need it at all," meaning that the "need" for the "whole" is not "high," and thus, she is not "particularly" obligated to them. Conversely, then, she is "particularly" obligated to Brendon and Isaiah because she assesses them to "need the most help" as a result of "their support at home." It is based on Tiera's focus of these students that I, too, focus in on them as I explore the deep interconnectedness of her teaching philosophy and view of AAL in the classroom.

**Personal use of AAL in the classroom.** Tiera's decision-making about her own use of AAL is integrally tied with her teaching philosophy.

Alice: ...I notice you don't really use...AAVE when you're teaching ...you also talked about your experience being an AAVE speaker... how do you feel like that influences ...how you perceive your students...?

Tiera: ...I don't really use AAVE only because I know that there's a time and a place... I don't want blatantly...downplay their usage of AAVE, but I want them to see that at school or when we're teaching or learning ...that AAVE is not the most appropriate at that time. ...if they speak it to me, then ...I don't ...cast them down, ...sometimes ...I'll have them ...replay what they said and then they'll correct it themselves.

Tiera uses her teaching philosophy as parameters for “appropriate” AAL use in the classroom. She does not see “at school” or during “teaching or learning” as “the most appropriate” time to use AAL. As will be further explained through data in the next section, this is partly due to her view that competency in “standard English” is a chief means for students to accomplish their “best.” In this excerpt, however, we see other tenets of her teaching philosophy at play, as she wants to avoid “cast[ing] them down.” Her approach, instead, is to have them “replay what they said,” and they “correct it themselves.” Below, she conceives of her language choice similar to wearing different clothes.

Tiera: I don't know ...how that would influence them as far as ...me speaking AAVE ...it's kinda convoluted. ...I don't want to speak AAVE in front of the classroom because even though AAVE is a language, it's not accepted widely beyond these people that believe that it's a language. And there's only a few of us that believe that out of the entire world, so I still want them to see that you

have to, it's almost like if I go into a business meeting, I have to put on the business coat, and I have to portray as a business person. ...if I go into a meeting where they speak standard English, I have to put on that coat and speak that because I want to appeal to them, I want them to know that I know your language and I'm able to utilize your language just as well as you can. ...I want them to see that at certain times, I can put on my AAVE coat, I can put it on when I'm with my friends, but when I come into this setting, we need to put on our standard English, our academic English coat. ...with me speaking the academic language in front of them, hopefully that's triggering them to ...get it together. ...mainly, they don't speak AAVE with me that much...I notice it a lot when they're talking with their friends, ...when we're doing class discussion, sometimes you'll hear it, but it's not ...super heavy...

Tiera's choice not to "speak AAVE in front of the classroom" is connected to her view that "it's not accepted widely beyond these people that believe that it's a language." With "the entire world" in mind, she considers the various contexts in which her students may need to "put on" the "standard English coat." Decisions about appropriate AAL use, including her own, are tied to what she envisions for her students' futures. The next subsection probes into these hopes, as well as how they are undergirded by what she considers "best" for her students.

**Operationalizing "best".** One key tenet in Tiera's teaching philosophy is helping students achieve their "best." In the next three excerpts, from the same follow-up interview, I interpret what Tiera means by "best" as I link data in which she shares her

goals for her students. As this first excerpt will show, however, Tiera internally struggled with how to fit her teaching philosophy with her view of AAL in the classroom.

Tiera: ...when it ...comes to teaching, I want them to see ...how I speak ...and how I use the academic language so ...they can have me to be that person that uses standard English while still feeling like my language is worthy ...I'm just kinda torn because I don't want to ... spend time and ...blatantly say "your language is wonderful" ...I don't want them to be walking on pins and needles around me when it comes to "should I speak AAVE ... oh no, wait, I gotta ..."

But I want them to be certain in that I'm okay that you use it, as long as you use it when it's appropriate to use it. And it's not saying that your language is no better than the other ...I know they can tell 'cause I'm a caring person so I do show love all the time with my students, but I wonder if there's a way to teach them the academic language but still reassure them that their language is okay, without just saying, "your language is okay," ...my other biggest fear is that I'm gonna comfort them a little bit too much that they don't even know how to speak the language of those in the standard English world. ...and that's my ultimate fear.

...I want them to see that their language is worthy enough, but then I want them to know that in order to make moves, you have to put on that hat, and you have to walk like these people that you're trying to walk into the door with ...you have to become who they want ...in order to get that position or in order to get into that job ...in order to network with those people...

Underlying her articulation of appropriate AAL use in the classroom, Tiera operationalizes what she considers the "best" for her students. Her "ultimate fear" for her

AAL speaking students is they will not “know how to speak the language of those in the standard English world.” The opposite of this, then, is her goal for them is to be able to “make moves,” “walk like these people,” “become who they want.” Their “best” would result from achieving these goals, “that position,” “that job,” and “to network with those people.” Given this data, I interpret Tiera to define “best” as future employment opportunities, and not being able to speak “standard English” as one the largest obstacles in achieving this “best.” Part of her role in helping students achieve their “best” is “to be that person that uses standard English.” The crux of her internal struggle lies with wanting “to teach them the academic language but still reassure them that their language is okay.” She is “torn” as she negotiates helping students achieve their “best,” without “shutting down” who they are. The conundrum with wanting to achieve both is that she is preparing students for a sociopolitical context built on a fabricated linguistic hierarchy. Within this hierarchy, “standard English” is the currency to attain one’s “best,” and, therefore, a person must choose *either* that dialect *or* a dialect lower on the social totem pole, if one is to “succeed.” This either/or frame of situating dialects of English provides no space for AAL to coexist equally to “standard English.” I assert that her internal struggle is related to an either/or view that is embedded in the sociopolitical context of what she considers “best.” This is not to say that AAL and LWC cannot be held in equal status within a classroom. However, inherent in how Tiera defines what is “best,” is this fabricated hierarchy in which AAL will always be “less” than LWC. Therefore, teachers interested in accomplishing what Tiera is “torn” to do, “to teach them the academic language but still reassure them that their language is okay,” will need to employ an approach that seeks to build students’ linguistic repertoire. In addition to this approach is

the need for more experiences and exposure on linguistic diversity in teacher education. It is important to note that Tiera only had one class, the required language course, in her pre-service program. While this course offered growth in learning about language, additional coursework could provide more forums for discussion. Further discussion about teacher education will be detailed in chapter seven. In this next excerpt, we continue to see her “torn” as she considers how to enact her teaching philosophy within her view of AAL in the classroom.

Tiera: ...it’s not that they (Brendon and Isaiah) don’t know (“standard English”), it’s the pursuit of ...making sure that this (“standard English”) becomes a part of them just as much as the AAVE is part of them. The AAVE is...like the default setting ...I just want the standard English language to come out of you as well ...you don’t have to dig and think about ...so I’m kind of torn of ...my method to use. (pause) But honestly, I really feel like as long as you don’t cast them down when they’re using it, then they...will be fine. ...If he just knows that I care about him holistically, then I don’t think that I have to focus so much on that one aspect of the language, ‘cause that’s just one part of my student...

Tiera reiterates the significance, to her, of having “the standard English language” becoming an integral part of who they are. From the previous excerpt, we know that speaking “standard English” is not the end goal, but a significant means for its attainment. She is still “torn” on her “method” of how to help students achieve their “best,” and, therefore, employs another tenet of her teaching philosophy—not “cast[ing] them down,” as a way to assure herself that they “will be fine.” As the conversation continues, we see that part of helping students be their “best,” is through being a “role model” for them.

Alice: so do you...feel like ...that's your way of supporting Brendon and Isaiah, is by speaking standard English?

Tiera: and by not casting down

Alice: ...the approach is...don't be negative towards their language but also be a model

Tiera: (at the same time as I say it) be a model

Alice: in terms of standard English

Tiera: mm-hmm (in agreement), yep

Alice: As a Black teacher, or as a Black person in authority.

Tiera: yep ...because they don't have a lot of Black people in authority that they see. All they see is ...cooks, the janitors are Black, the aides are Black. They don't see teachers...you have ...three teachers that are Black. And then one is retiring ...it's just like ... where are my people? ...I don't think, as a child you really think about it, until you get to that age, where you ...really ... think like, "yeah, all of my life ... I never really learned the truth about my people..." ...it's important that they see...yes, I'm Black, yes, I'm a female, and yes, I support you, but I want to be a role model in preparing you for those people that don't even recognize your language as a language. And I think that's what my mom did...even though she would correct me...because I knew she cared...it really didn't affect my self-esteem, it didn't affect the way I looked at my language because I knew she cared. I knew she wasn't saying it like she thought that her language was better than mine. I knew she was saying it because she wanted her baby to be able to ...navigate through this world successfully.



The end goal, again, as it was modeled for Tiera by her mother, and what she wants for her students is to “navigate through this world successfully,” and to prepare them “for those people that don’t even recognize your language as a language.” One key strategy she has named in achieving this “best,” is by being a “role model” for them as a “Black,” “female,” who speaks “standard English.” In the next example, we see another way Tiera fosters the “best” in her students, like Brendon.

***Brendon’s “best”.*** Tiera also uses other, “little” strategies to help Brendon achieve his “best.”

Tiera: ... Like with Brendon ...at first, he was doing his homework, but he would forget it at home, or he wouldn’t do it, or sometimes...it would be lost... so... I personally got him a folder, it’s just...the little things. ...I put “Homework” on it ... this is the side that you put when you need your homework, this is the side that you...bring back to school. ...from that moment...he started doing his homework more and then we started making promises “...Brendon, we want your brain to be full of knowledge...we gotta do this...we wanna make Mama proud, right?”

She continues to talk about helping him achieve his “best” by exposing him to various opportunities that can help achieve his goals and more.

Tiera: ...a little while ago, we were talking about ... college. At first he said he wanted to go to [local community college]. And I’m not opposed to [local community college]...but if you’re seven years old, if the only place that you think that you’re able to go is to a junior college, no matter where it is, something is wrong. Because you’re seven, and you have...the world ahead of you. ...if you wanted to, you could go to Yale...you can go across the seas, but all you

want to do is go down the block...that's not what's up. ...I don't want to cast down his dreams ...he wants to be a basketball player, of course, and I'm like, "okay, now I have two things to work with." (laughs) So I was just like, "...if you got to [local university], you could be a basketball player and you can go to school. Now, not saying you can be on the basketball team, but you can go to the [university fitness center], and play basketball with your friends, and you can still learn." He's like, "oh Ms. Tiera, how do you do that?" And I'm just like "...you can go to the gym in the morning, then go to class, then go to the gym afterwards," and he was so excited, like he had never heard of a way to still learn and do fun things at the same time. ...even if it's just me exposing them to ...a different world ...even if I can't physically take them there but if I can show them pictures...tell them about my time in college or ...the fun things I've done. Apparently they know, I don't give off ... the uppity ... "I've had it all together ...my whole life." ...since I'm able to relate to them on so many other levels, then they know...I'm really ... pulling for them ...I was a part of the same ...struggle that you're on... right now.

From Tiera's perspective, aside from knowing "standard English" in order to access future employment opportunities, Tiera views the knowledge of the existence of such opportunities important as well. By providing exposure to how the local university can also offer Brendon's interests, she is helping him see "the world ahead of you." I also observed Tiera accomplish "exposing them to a different world" through a "show and tell" lesson, in which she "show[ed] them pictures," told them "about my time in college," and "the fun things I've done." In a PowerPoint presentation, she showed pictures of a

personal pilgrimage she took to visit historic Civil Rights sites, like a church in Atlanta where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had preached and Little Rock Central High School. She also showed pictures of her high graduation, in which she was Valedictorian and member of the National Honor Society, as well as pictures of a trip she took to Costa Rica with the collegiate choir in which she was an active member of in college. This lesson was a way Tiera embodied her view that students needed to see “the world ahead” in order to achieve their “best.”

**The “push”.** Another key tenet in Tiera’s teaching philosophy is to “push” students towards their best. Below, Tiera tells us how this “push” was a means to achieving her “best.”

Tiera: ...even when I talk to ...other African Americans, like [close friend’s name]...we are ...two in the same... When we talk, it’s just like “yeah, when I was growing up, going to school wasn’t an option ...getting an education ...it wasn’t an option. And because we didn’t have that option, I know for me and her, ... we pride ourselves in the fact that we are making it and it’s because of that push. ...when you see the struggle, when you grow up, you don’t want to be in the struggle anymore. ...I thought I had the best childhood ...but then when you compare to other people that goes to ballet on Tuesdays, and then goes to language classes on Wednesdays, and goes out of the country Thursday and Friday ...you just think ...I want better. ...That’s where I am right now. I want better, not only for me, but I want better for my students. ...

“Better,” from Tiera’s perspective, is about not being in “the struggle anymore” and having a lifestyle that is comparable to those with more opportunities. She views herself

and “other African Americans” who are “making it” as a result of “that push.” Within that frame, then, in order for Tiera to help her students achieve what is “better,” she must also provide them with a “push.” In the data that follows, we see this “push” play out in Tiera’s interactions with Brendon, in reading group and also in her behavior management.

***Brendon in reading group.*** A large portion of my classroom observations focused on Tiera’s instruction of her reading group. This group consisted of five students, including Brendon. This group would meet simultaneous to other reading groups, all of them pre-organized by Tiera’s cooperating teacher, Nancy. From a conversation with her, Nancy informed me that Tiera’s group was, what she (Nancy) had determined, as the lower level group, mixed with ELL students. Nancy had pre-selected the same curriculum for all reading groups at the beginning of the year; those in Tiera’s group were given twice as long the time to complete content. In previous data, I showed how part of Tiera’s understanding of being “pushed” was having a standard set that was related to more academic achievement (e.g., finishing high school, completing college, etc.). In the fieldnote data below, we will see Tiera “pushing” Brendon towards more critical thought.

It is my fourth day observing Tiera in her classroom. I enter the room a little after 11:00am, and Tiera is already sitting in her corner of the classroom with her regular reading group. She is giving instructions to the group about what students needed to do to write their own stories about spiders, an activity based on the text they were reading. Students begin working independently on writing their stories, based on the story from the text. Tiera addresses students one-on-one, as questions and issues arise. As Tiera is conferencing with individual students, she

is also addressing the behavior of one of the students in the group. Tiera begins to work with Brendon, and as they talk about his spider story, she says to him, “Let’s start thinking before we say, ‘I don’t know’” as they talk about the different types of spiders listed in the text. Later in her conference with Brendon, he asks Tiera if there were Chinese spiders or if there were webs made of steel (not part of the text). Tiera responds to him, “Dale, let’s be realistic.” She then helps Brendon to think of another question by directing him to go back to the text. As they reread part of the spider story, Tiera asks Brendon to think about what the text was talking about on a particular page. Brendon then poses a question and Tiera tells him to write this question down because it is a good question. After he writes a question mark, he asks her, “How do you write a question mark?” Tiera tells him, “You just did it.” (fieldnote, March 17, 2014)

In this excerpt, we see that Tiera does not simply accept Brendon’s comment, “I don’t know” as information that he does not know. Rather, challenges him to “start thinking before” he says, “I don’t know.” Her comment implies that she thinks he is either not thinking before he makes such a statement, or that she wants him to think more before saying it. In either case, she is asking him to do more “thinking.” I link this request to her “pushing” Brendon, as she is setting a certain standard for him to achieve in his “thinking.” We see this standard being set again, as she tells Brendon to be “realistic,” when he asks her about “webs made of steel,” which is not part of the story. By referring him back to the text, she is setting a standard for him to use textual information. Tiera affirms his “good question,” only after he has gone back and thought about part of the text.

***Losing recess.*** Tiera's "push" can also be seen in her behavior management. While Tiera enacted behavior management with all students, various aspects of her teaching philosophy were especially apparent with Brendon. Previous data showed that Tiera also understood being "pushed" with having consequences for misbehavior, (e.g., "disrespect the teacher"). She also discussed how "chastis[ing]" or taking away students' recess is "okay" if students knew that the "teacher cares." We see these ideas enacted in the data below, as Tiera addresses Brendon and Isaiah's behavior, which eventually results in their loss of recess.

At around 11:40 a.m., less than an hour before lunch, Tiera calls the class to meet her at the carpet. She tells them about the edits she made to their writing on dairy cows, and gives instructions on how to re-write their final copies. As she gives these instructions, Tiera sees Brendon and Isaiah communicating to each other across the rug. She responds to this by saying, "I see a lot of cross talking and cross motion; I shouldn't." After she dismisses the class to work independently, Tiera periodically addresses Brendon and Isaiah's behavior, and makes comments like, "Brendon, get to your seat," and, "I hear laughter and talking that should not be. We should not be talking." Even though Tiera begins conferencing with another student, and her back is facing Brendon and Isaiah, she is distracted by what they are doing, and then turns her back to face the boys. One of these times she said to Brendon, "Why are we over there? Stop talking Brendon." After several more interruptions, Tiera finally said to them, "So we think something is funny? I need to see your pencil moving" (said with her hands on her hips). Brendon then starts to write but does so while singing. Tiera responds by saying,

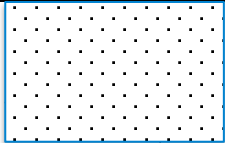
“Since we have two people who think something is funny during my lesson, you will be with me during recess.” After Tiera says this, Brendon and Isaiah both have frowns on their faces, with frustrated looks. Both of them both put one hand over their face. Isaiah asks Tiera if they have to miss their entire recess. Tiera says, “yes,” and that they don’t get to choose their consequence after they have made their choices. A minute or two after this incident, an announcement throughout the school is made that recess will be outdoors today. After this announcement, Isaiah and Dale do not have happy looks on their faces. Tiera continues to circulate around the room, independently conferencing with students about the progress of their work. As she is across the room, she notices Brendon doing something and says, “Brendon, if I walk over there and don’t see any work, I’m going to immediately call home.” He then immediately gets back to work. Students go to lunch and then go to recess right after. After Brendon and Isaiah come back to the classroom during recess time, Tiera tells them they are missing recess because they took time out of her lesson. She assigns them a writing assignment to reflect on what they did wrong. She tells them they will stop writing when she tells them to stop writing. After Brendon writes his reflection, he gives Tiera his paper. As she reads it, she crosses out (with a green pen) the words, “stupid” and “jerk”—words Dale used to describe himself. Tiera tells Brendon that he should not use these words to talk about himself. (fieldnote, March 17, 2014)

In the events of this fieldnote, we see that Tiera deems Brendon and Isaiah’s behavior to be worthy of taking their recess away. From her perspective, she is giving them a

“consequence” for “choices” they have made. The specific behaviors she addresses are, “cross talking,” Brendon being out of his seat, “talking” during independent work, and singing as a response to her correction. Implicit in the what behaviors she addresses, we can interpret Tiera’s standard for Brendon’s behavior to be one in which he is not communicating with others as she gives instructions, stays in his seat and independently works, and follows her re-direction. By taking his recess away, she is “pushing” him by providing a consequence for Brendon not meeting her standard. We also see, however, her show care in her correction. In his reflection, he calls himself “stupid” and “jerk.” She intentionally writes, instead, “You are intelligent.” A copy of this letter with Tiera’s comments is shown in the image below.



Figure 28. Brendon reflection letter.

  
 5/17/14  
 laughing and disrupting during lesson  
 TALKING  
 making JOKES  
 BEING A JERK  
 BEING STUPID  
 acting goofy  
 WASN'T BEING POLITE  
 I WAS laughing too much  
 WASN'T THINKING RIGHT  
 STOP GOOFING AROUND  
 START WORKING HARD  
 DON'T LET THE BODY  
 CONTROL YOU BE  
 INDEPENDENT NEVER  
 SHUT DOWN STOP  
 MAKING JOKES  
 DON'T INTERRUPT TEACHERS  
 LESSONS BE CONSIDERATE

**Balancing correction with care.** Through Tiera's frame of teaching, part of correcting students involved balancing it with care. In examples that follow, Tiera showed this care through various correction strategies, using positive praise, and showing affection. In the data below, Tiera shares about how she balances correction with care when students use AAL.

Alice: ...have those experiences of being corrected ...colored your approach with Brendon and Isaiah?

Tiera: ...I don't want to say that I never correct them, I just don't correct them in way that's just like... "What?! What did you say?! Oh no, we don't say it like," I don't want it to be like...where they're just, "oh well I'll just never say that again."

... if he says like, "Ms. Tiera, we gon go to da lunchroom right afda lunch or something" and I ...say like, "what did you say darlin', can you say it again?"

...like something soothing, like "honey, you know," (in sweet voice) and then they'll say, "oh, are we going to go to the lunch after ..." So I do correct them, but it's not in the way of ...me looking down on them. ... that's the same way as my teachers did me ... since I knew that they loved me, it was better to take on the correction, and I think that's the same thing with the language...since they know that I love them, and I care, then they hopefully take on my correction for a little bit better, than if I was just a teacher that was just like, "No, you're wrong. That language is wrong. Do it again ...don't participate until... you use the standard English" ...if I had that approach, that would be so detrimental to them.

...I don't really do it on carpet time, because I think it goes back to ...wait a minute, spotlight on me ... what'd I do wrong? ...I know them, especially

Brendon ...he's gotten a lot better, but he will shut down for the smallest of things. ...if we're doing a one-on-one thing, then maybe I'll ... correct him a little bit ...it's more comforting... I don't want it to be like, "oh man, every time I get with Ms. Tiera, I know she's gonna correct me, so I don't wanna work with her anymore..."

Tiera describes her approach in correcting students using AAL as "soothing," since she does not overtly correct, "we don't say it like that," but intentionally uses her tone (sweet voice) and word choice ("honey") if correcting. Another correction strategy she employs is rephrasing what a student has said in AAL in LWC. Context also plays a role in her correction strategies. She tries not to correct during "carpet time," a time that would shine the "spotlight" on the child and cause someone like Brendon to "shut down." Instead, a "one-on-one" context would be more "comforting." Within these correction strategies, we see a balance in correcting with care, so as not to "shut down" the child.

From my observations of Tiera, I found that she corrected all students in her class, at one point or another. She was also intentional to give positive praise and show affection, especially to those that may have received more correction at times. The data below show two instances (of many) in which Tiera publicly affirms Isaiah and shows affection to Brendon. This first excerpt comes from a lesson Tiera is teaching about idioms, in which students are seated at the rug. She has introduced various idioms like, "bury the hatchet," and "cut from the same cloth." The dialogue begins with Tiera asking for examples for the next idiom, "for better or worse." An Indian girl student, Diane, also participates in this conversation.

Tiera: ...so let's think of something that would be for better or for worse. ...most times you hear that when people get married...

(Pause. Short inaudible student talk.)

Diane: whether...(inaudible) or not, I will still come to school.

Tiera: ...whether schools becomes better, meaning we have more games, or school becomes worse, and they cut off P.E. (physical education) or something (Many students gasp and say "ooooohhhh")

Tiera: then Diane would still come to school, for better or worse, she's gonna get her education! ...

Isaiah: you said if they cut off P.E.?

...(inaudible students talking)...

Tiera: So what else? What's another example? So Isaiah said ...that if they cut out P.E., it's "no" for better or worse for him, he's just out of here. So we can't cut off P.E., we want Isaiah to stay here.

Tiera takes an aside comment that Isaiah said, and intentionally repeats it publicly. She does not correct or make evaluative comments about him not coming to school, but rather, concludes "so we can't cut off P.E." because "we want Isaiah to stay here." By saying that a schoolwide program must exist for this student to stay at the school, she is publicly valuing his presence as much as the program students gasped at the thought of losing. Tiera also shows care in less public ways, through affection. This next excerpt comes right before students are about to go to lunch and Tiera is trying to get students in a line before exiting the classroom.

Tiera: I need a line

Brendon: She needs a line... (said in a silly voice)

Tiera: Brendon, I need a quiet line

Tiera then tells him something very quietly, and in a teasing way. Brendon then giggles and says something quietly back to her. Tiera then straightens his ponytail and puts her arms around his neck in an endearing way. (fieldnote and audio-record, April 14, 2014)

After students go to the lunchroom, I asked Tiera what she and Brendon had said to each other.

Tiera: ...I said, "if it's a quiet, you're supposed to be quiet." And then he was... "okay," and he said it quietly. And I said, "what are you doin'?" You don't even know whatcha doin'." ...something like that...he started smiling, and then I started smil--, and I said, "Huh? Huh? What? What? What are you doing?" (in teasing tone)

From this interaction, we see this balance of correction as she tells Brendon she needs "a quiet line," but with care as she show him affection by straightening his hair and putting her arm around his neck in an endearing way. We further see this affection when she tells us of the playful banter in their quiet conversation. We understand the nature of her teasing tone as he smiles back at what she is saying. In these examples, then, we see how Tiera enacts the caring side in her teaching philosophy.

**Service in the curriculum.** In chapter five, we saw service as a theme that spanned across Tiera's personal and professional life. I introduced service as a key tenet of Tiera's teaching philosophy, as she had named "serving children and educating them" as part of her ideal future job placement. In data that follow, we will see how her service

in educating students intersects with her interest in diverse and marginalized populations. Towards the end of her student teaching experience, I interviewed Tiera, and she shared about various activities and projects she implemented with students, as the excerpt below details.

Tiera: ...I was able to do so much with them. I was able to really hone in on my great interest of social justice and...history...

Alice: ...what were some examples of it?

Tiera: The Freedom song video, the Freedom song that we used to listen to at the beginning of the semester, ...when we made our classroom quilt... because we listened to... songs that talk about unity, family... We did the show and tell ...we got to learn about the different cultures that were in the classroom ...it was something more than just bringing in your baby doll and your race car. I'm bringing in this cloth that people in my heritage, they wear this. Or I'm bringing in these coins that every time you're born in...Taiwan, they have ... coins that you have of the year you were born... Different traditions that you see in each different household... We read a lot of cultural books, like *Show Way* quilts...

Tiera's interest in diverse populations intersects with activities, like "show and tell," in which she wanted more than just "baby doll[s]" and "race car[s]," but she incorporated the cultures represented in the classroom. Tiera's reference about the "cloth" was part of a "show and tell," in which one of the ELL students, originally from Russia, shared about a cloth that her mother had made for her and symbolized her ethnic background. In the interview, Tiera continued to tell me about wanting students to learn about diverse historical figures.

Tiera: ...I tried to stray away from Dr. Martin Luther King, because he's done so much for us...I really appreciate all the hard work that he's done, but I feel like my kids are going to learn about him regardless...it's best to teach them about the people they may never hear about, so I taught them about Louis Armstrong ...

Ruby Bridges ...Rosa Parks, ...one of the youngest people to march from Selma to Montgomery. When we went to Selma, Alabama, I met her, I can't remember her name, but I taught them about those individuals, the foot soldiers that they probably wouldn't ... know...

By introducing students to other important African Americans in history, they were able to acquire more diverse knowledge about those who fought for the Civil Rights and more. I also asked Tiera about how the Freedom songs were introduced at the beginning of the semester, before I began my observations.

Tiera: They were learning about ...Mahatma Ghandi ... Dr. King, and ...Nelson Mandela, and how their choice for social equality...allowed us to have ...free rights... Within that, I talked about my pilgrimage to ...down South, and how we started in Atlanta where Dr. King was born and then we ended in Tennessee, but in between ...we went to ... Little Rock, Arkansas ...to Selma, Montgomery... I showed them different things about my trip to Atlanta ...where Dr. King was buried... And then I told them about the marches, ... Dr. King's marches, and then the songs that provided them with strength to keep going ...the Freedom songs. ...They really, really loved it. ...I told them at that moment, "well maybe we can do our own video" ...But when you say something to kids, they hold onto it, so...

Tiera shows us how she has enacted her personal life experiences into her curriculum. By incorporating her personal “pilgrimage” in a unit her cooperating teacher was teaching about “social equality,” Tiera enhanced students’ knowledge about marginalized people by educating them about historical Civil Rights sites. The images below are the front and back side of Tiera’s “identity card” that she made, and had students make as well. As shown, the Freedom songs represent a part of her identity.

Figure 29. Tiera identity card front side.

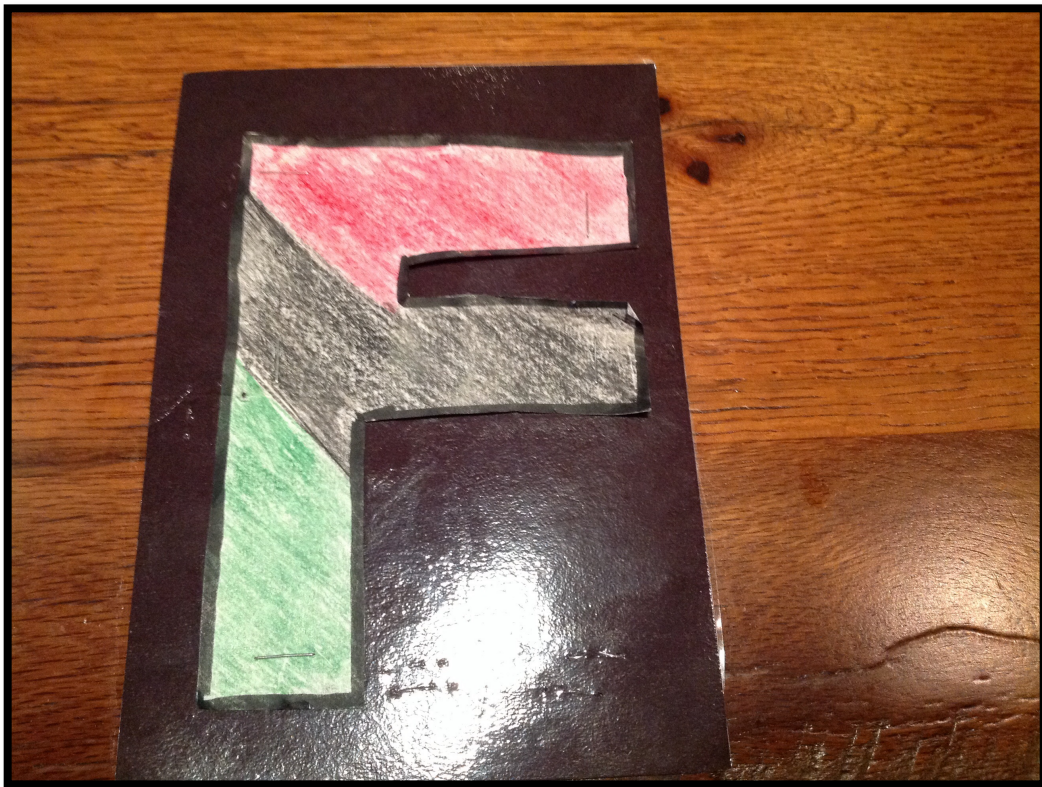
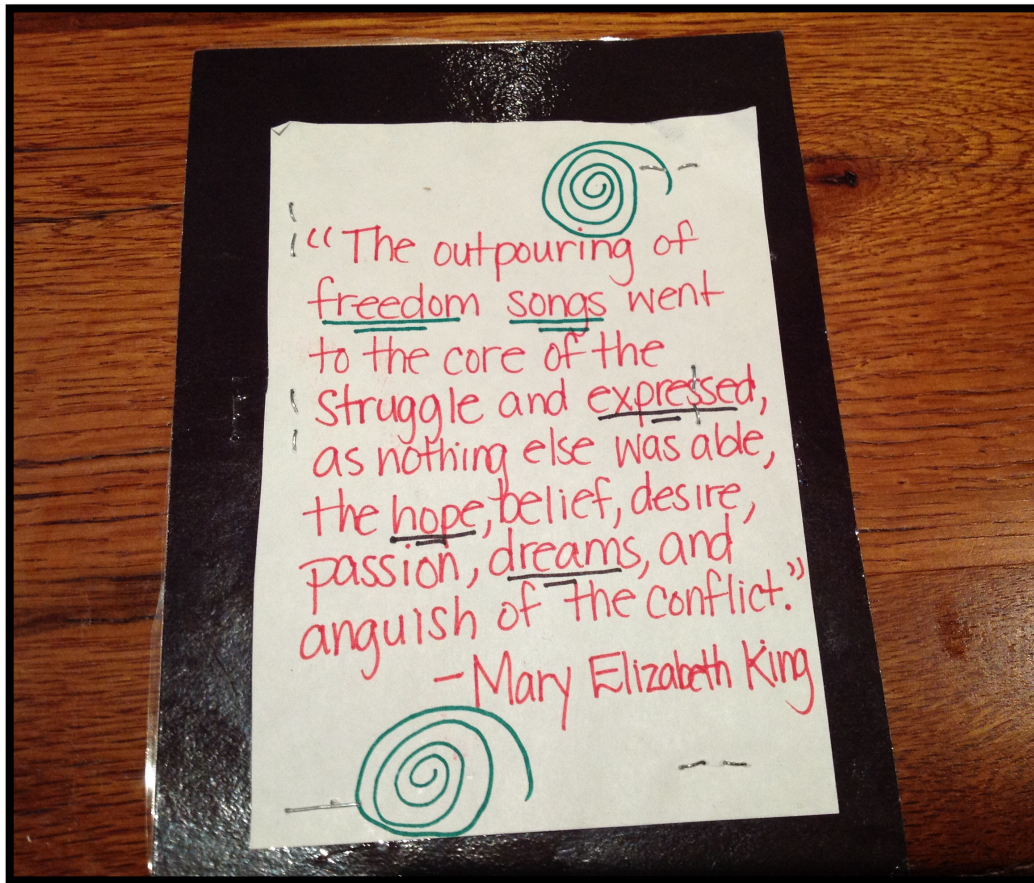




Figure 30. Tiera identity card back side.



In previous data, Tiera referred to “singing as my offering.” At the end of the semester, Tiera used her “offering” to teach her students how to sing one of the Freedom songs, “Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round.” Drawing on her experiences in a collegiate choir, Tiera coached her students how to perform the song, which she recorded and turned into a DVD for students to take home. In this last excerpt from the same interview, I asked Tiera about her goals for student learning.

Tiera: I want them to first see that the world has not always been as quote-unquote equal as it is now...they can see that there were people that actually had to

fight for what you freely have...to see the beauty in differences, period. ...How just because you're from a different place of the continent, or...different place of the world...we should not discredit your heritage, your history, your culture, because...you're not the majority at this time. ...I also just want them to learn about things you just wouldn't get out of the textbook...I love African American history, they don't go into detail about any, any minority group... I want to be that voice to give it... I want it to keep going...if I don't do it, or if our generation, ...if we don't bind... together to teach the kids exactly what happened, then they won't know...

We see, then, that her teaching philosophy and interest in diverse/marginalized populations particularly intersect in her goals for student learning, as she wants them “to see the beauty in differences,” about “African American history,” and about “any minority group.” As data from this subsection show, she achieved these goals through the activities/projects she created. In this way, her curriculum embodied not only aspects of her teaching philosophy, but also who Tiera is.

**Complicating voices.** Tiera's ideas about what role and how AAL fits into the curriculum were complicated by other voices. During an interview with Tiera, I asked her about where she sees AAL being a “best fit” in the curriculum.

Alice: ...you choose to use what ...best fits in a certain situation. Do you see AAVE as being a best fit anywhere in your classroom? And if so, where?

Tiera: well, since we're doing cultural ...thing about where we are in time and place, and talking about family history...if I wanted to do a spin on languages, ... then AAVE would fit. But my only fear then is that maybe some students will

say, like “oh that’s not a language ...it’s just slang, or that’s just you being lazy,” and then I have to go through the whole thing of, “yes honey, it’s a language...I think in that way, it will totally fit because it’s about our culture...you speak Russian, because you were raised in Russia. You speak Vietnamese because that’s where you were raised... I speak AAVE because even though I’m raised in America, I was raised in a culture in which that’s the language that they spoke. ...maybe it could be used then?

As Tiera considers introducing AAL in a unit students are working on related to family and culture, we see that she has reservations about incorporating it in. Her “only fear” is that students will reject its linguistic legitimacy and raise stereotypes connected with the language. The voices of her students, and the “fear” of what they might say, complicate her consideration of incorporating AAL in the curriculum. In the excerpt below, Tiera mentions an incident that revealed her cooperating teacher’s (Nancy) views of AAL.

Tiera: ...and then... when we... read literature ...we’ve been talking about quilts, and the African American history and ... in some of the books, they have AAVE in it. ...when I was reading it, I made sure I said, “...and this is the language that they’re using in the book, it’s AAVE,” and I said that. ...and Nancy, she said, “oh yeah ...I don’t want you all to be looking at Ms. Tiera wrong, as if she’s not saying it right.” And when she said, “not saying it right,” I’m just like “ouch!” ...I mean, she didn’t know...or maybe she wasn’t trying to be harmful, but I’m just like, “right,” that’s not a good word to use because then it’s like, wait a minute, I speak the same language that they’re saying in this book, so are you saying that my language isn’t right? ...I don’t know, but I was clear in telling

them that this is the language they use in that time... a few weeks later we read a book that came from ... the Indian culture, and they used...the terms that they used ... some of my students... helped me to say the term, and so I wanted them to see that, that's a part of your culture, just like how Brendon and Isaiah ...probably could've helped me with the AAVE if I didn't know how to say it ...

Alice: so when you were reading the book, ...Nancy had kind of ...jumped into the lesson?

Tiera: ...'cause I knew it was about to be something, so I just decided to tell them like "this is the book...this is the time in which they wrote it...back then ...this is how individuals used to speak, or this is the language of those people in that culture...this is the language that they're using in the book..."

Nancy's interjection in Tiera's lesson, "as if she's not saying it right," reveals her understanding about AAL as language that is "wrong." As Tiera's cooperating teacher, and, for academic purposes, mentor, Nancy's voice is institutionally positioned to bear more "experience" and "knowledge" than Tiera's. Nancy's positionality, with respect to Tiera, in that context, makes it difficult for Tiera to supersede Nancy's voice.

Additionally, given the role Nancy has in Tiera's academic and professional life, Tiera may also be influenced by Nancy's views of AAL as she considers "appropriate" use of AAL in the classroom. Others in her life, like Tiera's personal mentor throughout college, who is an African American faculty member, added her thoughts about the role of AAL use in the classroom as well.

Tiera: ...I was talking to my mentor and she was...saying how ...they hear the AAVE language all the time, and so by you letting them use it in the classroom,

then that's kind of like pushing them back further ...a lot of kids don't have the same family make-up as me and so maybe they never get that extra guidance ... within schools, since I know that, I don't want to be ...like "yeah, baby, go ahead and use it," and then after they get out of the second grade or even go into the third grade, they just don't know anything ... they only know ...AAVE. I mean, AAVE is good, but ...life is all about ...playing a role ...you have to play that role.

Tiera's mentor views the usage of AAL in the classroom as a way of "pushing them (AAL speakers) back further." This mentor's view is consistent with the previous discussion regarding an either/or frame that inherently values "standard English" over AAL in order to "play that role." We gain a glimpse of the difficulty for Tiera, as well as all AAL speakers, in navigating a racist sociopolitical context while also maintaining one's own cultural identity.

We saw, in part, Tiera as an embodied toolkit, in her first experience as a classroom teacher. We know, from chapter five, that Tiera encompasses a considerable amount of accumulated knowledge. The enactment of that is still being worked through as Tiera thinks about how her teaching philosophy can be infused within her practices and curriculum. This section documents the intellectual and physical work already done, as she invested in relationships with students, strove to "push" without "shutting down" Brendon in reading group and behavioral management, and shared her personal pilgrimage to expose students to "the world ahead."

## **Conclusion**

In each case, at the center of lessons, activities, and pedagogy, was the teacher. We saw how Sara used her knowledge of bilingual methods to create a “menu of scaffolds” for a culturally and linguistically diverse body of students, not as a generic strategy for “all” students, but incorporated at different times for different students. Her “two part” view of race is personified in lessons intended to build racial identity and awareness of racism, through the selection of multicultural literature and texts like Adichie’s “Danger of a Single Story.” We also saw the ways Raniya embodied her fluid view of language learners as an advocate for AAL speakers in schoolwide assessments, as well as within her own classroom assessments as well. Her extensive knowledge of language acquisition helped her understand all her students as positioned on a language spectrum, and be particularly attuned to her instructional practices for linguistically diverse students. As a novice teacher, Tiera was in the process of working out how her teaching philosophy could manifest within her views of AAL in the classroom, given her complex positionality as both native AAL-speaker and pre-service teacher. Her journey, however, in engaging in the intellectual work behind all pedagogy, is what identifies all teachers as embodied toolkits. In the next chapter, I discuss the implications of such a view of teachers.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Discussion**

This chapter provides an overview of my findings from chapters four, five, and six. I also discuss the implication of these findings, particularly as they relate to professional development, teacher education, the use of mandated curriculum, and teacher evaluations. I close with my own experiences regarding the development of the idea of teachers as embodied toolkits.

### **Overview of Findings**

Across cases, teachers shared similar knowledge about AAL as a linguistically legitimate, rule-governed dialect, situated in an American sociopolitical and historical context. Their differences, however, were as distinct as their life experiences. Varied understandings about language were nuanced by diverse life experiences, including personal, professional, and academic—what I referred to as accumulated knowledge. It is the consideration and inclusion of personal experiences that differentiates how I define accumulated knowledge from how knowledge is traditionally constructed in academic settings. Validating personal sources, like home and community, as avenues for “real” knowledge parallels a “funds of knowledge” approach in valuing a child’s home life as resources to the classroom (Gonzalez & Moll, 2005). In Sara’s life, we saw how her teaching experiences meshed with her life as a graduate student, eventually forming deep friendships, all as she developed a linguistic/sociolinguistic understanding of language. We also saw how Raniya’s graduate coursework enhanced her experiences as a teacher, and vice versa. The combination of both aspects of her life helped form an extensive knowledge of language acquisition. Tiera’s family background, and some college

courses, shaped her philosophy as a teacher, her view of AAL in the classroom, and interest in teaching marginalized populations. In each case, we saw a complex, meshing of experiences from all avenues of their lives.

**Significance of meshing.** This meshing is similar to notions that explain cognitive development as an inseparability between a person and one's social world (Rogoff, 1990). That is, the experiences one has, and the person, are "mutually embedded"; to understand one's knowledge is to understand that person's life. Consideration for each teacher's knowledge, then, was more than tracing how experiences meshed together, but an inquiry into the *significance* of meshing in each teacher's life.

For Sara, her family relationships, personal friendships, and experiences teaching students of colors, opened up "this whole world" that she had not previously been exposed to. These opportunities piqued an interest in language and culture that flowed into her professional and academic life, as she developed a racially conscious curriculum and also obtained a Master's in teaching ESL. Along the way, she constructed a "two part" view of race by which she used to "buoy" students' racial identity and build awareness of the racism embedded within our sociopolitical world. The data I presented from Sara's myriad life experiences document her as a teacher who cared for and considered students' cultural and linguistic identities.

Raniya's experiences as an early childhood teacher for fourteen years, in conjunction with her extensive knowledge of language acquisition, helped her understand all students as language learners, fluidly positioned on a language spectrum. Her personal experiences, being schooled by mostly Black teachers, growing up as a "mixed"



AAL speaker and reading about the inequities still facing Black and Latino youth, all played a role in the ideas she has about the treatment of Black students. Graduate school experiences, such as those that pushed her “out of the box,” provided firsthand exposure to the difficulties of being immersed in another language. These are some of the experiences that helped me understand Raniya as a teacher, shaped by a dynamic interplay between her professional and academic life that is attuned to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse children.

Tiera’s upbringing was largely influenced by her parents and their view of how to raise an AAL speaking Black child to “navigate through this world successfully” at that time. From her perspective, their correction and the “push” she experienced from teachers and mentors alike, are what helped her achieve her “best” and why she is “making it” now. Tiera believed their correction, however, to be balanced with “nurture,” which is what helped build her self-esteem and not “shut down.” The delicate balance between this “push” and “nurture” within parameters was all part of Tiera’s understanding that “life is about playing a role,” which should look and sound different from the cultural and linguistic norms of her own home. The complexities of her upbringing played a salient role in her philosophy of teaching. The tenets by which her parents raised her were the same tenets we also saw Tiera employ for her students and classroom. These experiences helped me understand Tiera, her teaching philosophy, and her views of AAL as one, intermingled journey.

**Enactment of accumulated knowledge.** Central to viewing teachers as embodied toolkits is the idea that a *teacher* is at the heart of all pedagogy. It is the teacher who reads, thinks about, and plans for lessons. These lessons do not teach

themselves; the teacher must do the work of instructing and scaffolding individual learning, all while managing behavior. Teachers must interpret whatever instructional resources they have within their accumulated knowledge. But this knowledge is not a set of ideas they hold and can reference in the middle of a lesson. There are countless split-second moments in any lesson where the teacher must assess the situation and almost reflexively adjust instruction. Accumulated knowledge, then, is knowledge that is a part of who a teacher is, and it is this knowledge that is enacted into the classroom. In my observations, I witnessed each teacher complete all of this and more.

Sara used her knowledge of bilingual methods as a way to differentiate instruction for students with a variety of needs. Incorporating student-to-student talk, for example, was planned for more independent work times, but she orchestrated different approaches at different times. Sometimes she allowed students to choose whether or not they wanted to work with others, and other times, she would organize them in literature circles to discuss various topics. Whenever students were given opportunities to talk with one another, Sara monitored conversations, volume, and group dynamics. This one strategy, utilizing student talk, was but one of her “menu of scaffolds” that she implemented in writing, teaching academic vocabulary, and using visuals/multi-media techniques. There was, of course, her “two-part” view of race that inspired her to develop a unit that asked questions like, “How do race and culture impact our identity?” and “How does family impact our identity?” Her understandings of race, culture, family, and language pervaded her curriculum through her choice of literature circle books and texts such as Adichie’s “Danger of a Single Story” and Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Sara used these

texts to show students that their lives are more than a single story, despite how societal structures may pigeonhole them otherwise.

Raniya's fluid view of all students as language learners informed both her instructional practices and assessments. She understood that language acquisition was a process, and rather than evaluating students as either "proficient" or not, she collected language samples of all her students throughout the year. These samples served as artifacts for her to evaluate students' language development based on growth. Her knowledge of AAL as linguistically legitimate also played out in her assessment of student language, as well as school-wide. When evaluating language samples, she acknowledged AAL's lexicon and syntactic variations, and did not discount the use of AAL in scoring language samples. Raniya understood that language is not acquired through the enforcement of LWC in children's speech, but in helping students communicate meaning through words. This was evident in her advocacy for all students in schoolwide assessments. Her attunement toward culturally and linguistically diverse students played out in her instructional practices as well. She honored all students' languages in class activities, for example, creating Mother's Day cards in which AAL, other languages and other English vernaculars were included. Empathizing with the difficulties of being immersed in language not used at home, Raniya incorporated visuals, hand gestures, and body motions to teach literacy, social skills, and even behavioral expectations.

Tiera's philosophy of teaching shaped the way she approached her instruction, her students, and the role of AAL in the classroom. Embedded within her own usage of AAL as with its usage among students in her classroom, were notions about "pushing" students

toward their “best” without “shutting them down.” Within the classroom context, Tiera defined “best” as helping prepare students for future employment opportunities of their choosing. Drawing on her accumulated knowledge, achievement of one’s “best” was through mastery of “standard English.” Therefore, one way she fostered students’ “best” was by being a “role model” as a Black female in authority who spoke “standard English.” For Tiera, facilitating students’ “best” also meant helping them become as proficient in “standard” English as they were in AAL. She was “torn,” however, in her methods for accomplishing this goal. Her correction strategies included allowing students to correct themselves, as well as using a “soothing” tone and word choice when students used AAL. Tiera used positive affirmation, affection, and humor as ways to balance her correction with care. Even as a “student teacher,” Tiera initiated ways to enhance and modify her cooperating teacher’s curricula in order to share with her students, issues associated with justice and diversity.

### **Implications**

In a field that continues to standardize all things—learning standards, curricula, teachers—the one, overwhelmingly, standard element among all my teachers were their differences. Each teacher, based on her life journey, interpreted experiences along life’s way that shaped her understandings about the role of a teacher, the purposes of education, and for whom it is meant. These notions did not sit as lofty ideas the teacher would consult every now and then, but were an integral part of who they are, expressed as *lived* philosophies. And it is she, the teacher, who embodies instructional ideas, resources, even scripted curriculum, and puts them into motion through her instruction, practices, and decision-making. The view of teachers as embodied toolkits refocuses pedagogy

from the materials, traditional toolkits, and standardized curricula back into the life force driving all things related to teaching and learning in the classroom. This view of teachers pushes back on current ideologies underpinning professional development, teacher education, mandated curriculum selection processes, and policies regarding teacher evaluation.

**Professional Development.** Much of the professional development I have attended in the last decade sought to “develop” teachers through direct instruction, with little to no regard for what knowledge teachers already brought with them. Implicit in the view of teachers as embodied toolkits, however, is the understanding that their varied life experiences are a starting point for new learning. It views all teachers on a continuum of growth, ever changing and shaped by the experiences in our lives. A majority of the current teaching population is comprised of middle-class, White women, without much exposure to linguistic and cultural diversity. Viewing them as embodied toolkits bridges their lived experiences as a starting point for growing their understandings and teaching practices of populations unlike themselves. By encouraging new learning experiences built on those from the past, teachers have a pathway that can connect to the narratives of their students’ lives.

One key idea that an embodied toolkits approach employs is the notion of teachers existing on a continuum of learning. This notion departs from the underlying ideologies of professional development that instruct teachers as one monolithic group. I first use a personal example to show how knowledge construction is an unending process. As a teaching assistant for a pre-service language course during my doctoral program, I introduced students to linguistic perspectives about dialects of English. One idea I

reiterated was the fact that all people speak a dialect, and that “standard English” is a myth, and a dialect itself. What we consider “standard” is such for sociopolitical reasons. I would, however, refer to AAL speaking students and others who spoke marginalized dialects as “dialect speaking students.” My language was problematic because it reinforced the idea that people of color speak dialects and those who use LWC do not. During a small group discussion one day, a student asked me for clarification, saying that if we all speak a dialect, wouldn’t all students be considered “dialect speaking?” Her question made me reflect on the ways the varied contexts in my life have deeply shaped my language and me, even in unconscious ways. I was thankful for my student’s candid question, as it reminded me of the growth still needed, even within my own research interest and dissertation topic. It is also an example of the complexity of people, and that a person can display conflicting or contrary language/ideas based on those complexities. For me, my choice of language (conscious and subconscious) represented ideas that were contrary to ones I had explicitly stated. I knew and firmly believe that all people speak a dialect, yet the nuances of how LWC fit into this knowledge were reason for more critical consideration of this topic. I argue that it is this critical consideration in the nuances of our varied understandings where professional development occurs. Similarly, as previously mentioned throughout data from my cases, I consider how these teachers could also be professionally developed. My exploration of room for potential professional development of my cases is not an evaluation of their views or who they are as teachers. Rather, my point is that all teachers, even those knowledgeable about a topic, exist on a continuum of learning, and it is this approach that should be employed when seeking to develop teachers.

As previously mentioned, Sara's "two part" view of race situated racial identity and racism as separate entities, internal and external. Within this frame, she believed that if students were educated about what occurred on the external level (e.g., institutional racism), then that awareness could help "buoy" their own racial identities. Based on literature cited in chapter four about cognitive development from a sociocultural lens, the individual is "inseparable" from one's social world; and thus, one's racial identity is not separate from how that race is constructed in society. From data collected, the notion of race was more often linked to people of color than with Whites. This could be for a variety of reasons, including the time constraints within my own data collection, as well as the way Sara possibly views her own racial positioning. The tendency for many to associate issues of race with people of color paints Whites as raceless. While further data would need to be collected in order to better understand Sara's ideologies, it is important to consider how this "two part" view of race could be extended. One such frame that could be helpful in extending Sara's "two part" view is critical race theory (CRT). CRT theorists acknowledge the endemic, persistent racism against Blacks in America, and argue that empowerment comes for the oppressed when they are empowered to have a voice and address real, systemic issues (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). In the case of her Latino student who was questioned by police for knocking on doors in his neighborhood, from a CRT frame, empowerment would involve inquiry into the racialized practices within local police, and providing the student with opportunity to, perhaps, voice his experience and bring awareness to the community. It is, of course, easy for me to provide suggestions from my computer, but institutional and professional constraints can make it difficult to implement new ideas. My point, though, is that all of

us construct the world from our own frames, and there is always room for literature (new and old) to help reflect and grow us in our understandings. Each teacher, however, must decide what significance new learning has in her own classroom; and, it is this act that defines a teacher as an embodied toolkit.

Data presented on Raniya document her knowledge of language acquisition and her role as a teacher who advocated for school-wide assessments based on meaning, and not form. In an interview discussing school-wide assessments, she had also mentioned that she and other colleagues from work considered themselves as students' "first teachers of language." By understanding themselves in this way, these teachers discount what language students already bring to schools, a point Raniya articulated to me in our first interview. Comparable to me, her comments were contrary to what she knew. I interpret this as an example for the ways we can hold contradictory ideas. But it is those contradictions that can help us reflect on our own accumulated knowledge, and consider room for new growth. Data collected from Tiera, too, displayed contrary ideas.

Throughout various interviews, Tiera referred to usage of AAL as a "lazy tongue," but she also shared, on numerous accounts, her pride and esteem in her language and culture. As discussed in chapter six, we saw that she had an internal struggle over her dichotomous view of using AAL/LWC in the classroom (either/or frame) while also wanting to affirm students' home language. Professional development for Tiera could be in the form of incorporating literature that provides her with varying views of AAL, as well as ongoing dialogue that helps her sift through her own complex positioning. In each of the examples provided, consideration for development begins first with the teacher's experiences and knowledge.



**Teacher Education.** Understanding teachers as embodied toolkits also has implications for teacher education programs as well. Rarely do these programs provide varying levels of required coursework for pre-service teachers regarding linguistic diversity (González & Darling-Hammond, 2000). While many programs offer endorsements/certification in bilingual education, minimal academic attention is paid to dialects of English, particularly those that are marginalized. In addition to providing multiple learning opportunities for dialect diversity, pre-service coursework needs to make theoretical connections between linguistic diversity and language acquisition, as well as exposure to linguistic/socio-linguistic notions of language. In courses related to language and literacy, language diversity is often presented as others' cultures/languages that need to be respected, acknowledged, or accepted. This superficial view of language diversity does not expose students to the idea that language acquisition is a social process by which students are socialized before entering schools. Pre-service teachers need to understand the legitimacy of varying dialects based, in part, by measures in the field of linguistics. Employing a view of teachers as embodied toolkits means that the understandings we hope to foster in pre-services teachers must be facilitated through teachers' own experiences. Assignments structured for students to reflect on their own multi-faceted experiences should be used as starting points of instruction, similar to professional development for in-service teachers.

**Mandated Curriculum/Teacher Evaluation.** The frame that I propose in this project is also significant to the practice of mandating standardized curriculum. To be clear, I am not opposed to the use of professional texts and resources, even ones that use the term "toolkits" in its title. For example, I have personally used and found beneficial

the resource *The Comprehension Toolkit* by Harvey and Goudvis (2010) in my own classroom use. This was a resource I read, interpreted, and used as I saw fit, based on student need. Mandating curriculum, however, is a very different practice. This practice often involves ensuring that teachers implement lessons with “fidelity,” which means instruction must closely following a teacher handbook, with almost no room for teacher input. A teacher veering from this handbook could result in “falling behind” in curriculum, and then “risking” a (supposedly related) drop in student test scores, or so teachers are told. Mandating standardized curriculum is, essentially, naming the teacher handbook as the intellectual, instructional leader of the classroom. One significant problem (of many) is the devaluation of what teachers can and could potentially bring to the classroom. From an embodied toolkits approach, teachers would be developed to select curriculum, modify pacing, and use a variety of resources as they saw fit. This view would also have ramifications for teacher evaluations being tied to student standardized test scores. Measuring teachers by their students’ test scores does not value nor provide incentive for teachers to grow in different ways. Providing other evaluation measurements, such as growing teacher knowledge about a particular topic, values and rewards other types of work in which teachers might engage.

### **Limitations and Future Research**

As previously stated, the intention of this project was not an attempt to investigate or document the entirety of teachers’ accumulated knowledge. To do so would be impossible. Therefore, the sampling of accumulated knowledge that I did record was based on what teachers informed me, within a limited amount of time. Time constraints pertained to both interview lengths and the amount of classroom observations of teachers.

Additional observational data might have provided more artifacts for teachers' enactment of knowledge. There are also, more general, limitations tied to the nature of qualitative research. The three case studies are not meant to be representative of larger populations of teachers. The findings for each case are generalizable only within the case itself, but the ideas discussed can be compared with existing literature, as well as provide more avenues for future research. Among these are the need to further examine what an embodied toolkit approach would look like for both pre-service and in-service teachers, as well as additional research documenting the ways teachers knowledgeable about AAL enact such knowledge in their classroom. Literature regarding practical strategies, approaches, and specific techniques on how to incorporate AAL into curriculum and instruction could be beneficial to teachers.

### **My Experiences**

Finally, I include critical events of my own during analysis and development of this frame. Inherent in the idea of the teacher as an embodied toolkit is the significance of one's sociocultural experiences in the process of learning. I find it salient, then, to also document some of my own experiences that sparked connections to my data, and contributed to my thinking. Just as it is the accumulated knowledge that forms each of my cases as teachers to enact what they do in the classroom, my experiences have formed who I am. My experiences as teacher, graduate student, mentor/teacher to both pre- and in-service teachers, mother, and my being married to a fellow teacher and doctoral student have all meshed and dynamically influenced one another, so that I can safely say the absence of one would significantly alter the others. And so, I would be remiss to stay

silent about some of the critical experiences that affected my thinking during the analysis of this project.

During the semester of this analysis, I was also a teaching assistant for one section of the required language course for elementary education majors at my university. The first half of the course focused on dialects of English, particularly AAL, while the latter half focused on second language acquisition/bilingual methods. The first time teaching this class, I was eager to foster learning on a topic dear to my own heart. During the first half of the course, I was very pleased with critical dialogue occurring over readings, and topics related to race, class, and language. Through my own observations of class discussion, as well as from much positive feedback about this course and its content from students, I thought that much learning had occurred and was hopeful that students had shifted in thinking. At the midpoint of the semester, students were assigned to write an autobiographic paper tracing their own cultural and linguistic heritage. One of the essay prompts asked students to discuss how learning about their backgrounds influenced expectations for students. The majority of them, like many other pre-service programs nationwide, were White, from the suburbs, and had very little experiences/exposure to varied cultures, languages, and class. An overwhelming number of the pre-service teachers wrote about their Western European backgrounds. They shared about the legacy of hard work their families left them and how they, too, would apply principles of hard work towards their future students. Some, with sincerity, wrote about becoming parental figures for their diverse students, since they believed these students to be lacking those roles, or if the students did have parents or parental figures, the preservice teachers assumed these other adults did not value education. Needless to say, I was shocked by

what I read, not only because I had repeatedly addressed these very issues in class, but also because I witnessed these same people say things I considered contradictory to what they wrote. I questioned their learning, my efficacy as an instructor, and also the feasibility of affecting real change in others. As I reflected on this event, however, the varied lenses out of my lived experiences mentioned above helped me interpret the situation. Yes, students did learn. Yes, I did make a difference for many of them. And yes, it takes a lot for people to shift in thinking, since it took their lifetime to get them there. The reasoning for writing what they wrote can be traced back to their own experiences, their families, friends, and other social groups. This realization, perhaps subconsciously, linked to my data, as I struggled to make sense of what role personal experiences had in my cases' knowledge construction, and how to interpret the "messiness" and meshing of them.

Another significant experience that spanned from the end of my collection period to write-up was the participation in a doctoral seminar that met weekly, under the guidance of a faculty member. Functioning similarly to a writing group, we were on a rotation to share our work every few weeks. The intellectual discourse, and often, sparring about ideas, that took place each week, stretched me to think not only of my own project in new ways, but exercised my thinking about qualitative research. What was assigned as a three-hour class eventually became four hours, and what was originally designed as semester-long course, turned into year-long course. We became a community of scholars. And it was in this community that I debuted my initial findings, which were complicated by others' feedback, in my first attempts at organizing Sara's experiences. Other students suggested the term "toolkit," as a metaphor describing Sara's

knowledge and teaching strategies. Another student offered the term “embodied pedagogy” as a way to consider how Sara’s teaching might connect with performance. Sometimes describing what something is not can help lead you closer to what something is. In my case, I knew that Sara’s knowledge was not simply an appendage of strategies that she periodically selected to use. From my data, I saw her experiences shaping who Sara was; and it was Sara, the person, who enacted her pedagogy. It was the group that also suggested various literature and theoretical frames to consider, much of what was referenced in chapter four. These critical dialogues I had with peers and mentors, meshed with a myriad of other experiences, contributed to who I am as a researcher, and the construction of embodied toolkit.

## **Conclusion**

It is fitting for me to close this project with my own experiences because this study is foregrounded on the experiences of people. People are what fill a classroom. People are at the heart of teaching. And at the heart of this project is the connection of different people with different experiences. Our students, mostly Black youth, and those who are also AAL speakers, continue to receive an education many parents would not wish for their own children. Yet with all the money spent on fancy curriculum, guest speakers, time spent in trainings and in countless meetings debating policies to “help” our students, not only has education not improved for those most marginalized, but we have also lost sight of the people. Through this project, it has been my intention to refocus pedagogy back to those who live it. The teachers I studied influenced the lives of their AAL-speaking students, not because they followed a formula or read off a script, but because they were knowledgeable as a result of who they are.

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## Appendix A: TEACHER SURVEY PAGE 1

### IN-SERVICE/ PRE-SERVICE TEACHER SURVEY

#### BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Name:
E-mail address: _____ Phone number: _____
Circle one: _____ Pre-Service teacher _____ In-Service teacher
If you circled in-service teacher, how many years have you taught (including this year)? _____
Current grade level: _____

#### EDUCATION

<div><input type="checkbox"/> I grew up in a(n):<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Urban setting</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Suburban setting</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Small town</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Rural community</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____</li></ul></div>
<div><input type="checkbox"/> I grew up in a community that was:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Homogeneous</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Heterogeneous</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Outside of the U.S. _____ (where?)</li></ul></div>
<div><input type="checkbox"/> I participated in an activity (besides vacation) located in another country:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Yes _____ (where?)</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> No</li></ul></div>
<div><input type="checkbox"/> Where did you receive your undergraduate degree?</div>
<div><input type="checkbox"/> What was your undergraduate degree major(s)? If you are/were an education major, list your minor or concentration.</div>
<div><input type="checkbox"/> Your level of graduate studies:<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Masters in Education</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Certificate of Advanced Studies in Education</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Currently working toward doctoral degree in Education</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Ph. D or Ed. D. in Education</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> None</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) _____</li></ul></div>

## Appendix B: TEACHER SURVEY PAGE 2

My definition of diversity is: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### ENCOUNTERS WITH DIVERSITY

For each item identified below, circle the number that best describes your experiences.

1 = none; 3 = some; 5 = extensive

Then circle "positive," "neutral," or "negative," to describe your varied encounters with diversity.

Encounters with diversity	Circle one				
1a. I had encounters with racial/ class diversity in my early childhood grades (grades K-2).	1	2	3	4	5
1b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive	Neutral	Negative		
2a. I had encounters with racial/ class diversity in my elementary grades (grades 3-5).	1	2	3	4	5
2b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive	Neutral	Negative		
3a. I had encounters with racial/ class diversity in middle school (grades 6-8).	1	2	3	4	5
3b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive	Neutral	Negative		
4a. I had encounters with racial/ class diversity in high school (grades 9-12).	1	2	3	4	5
4b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive	Neutral	Negative		
5a. I had encounters with racial/ class diversity in my post-secondary education.	1	2	3	4	5
5b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive	Neutral	Negative		
6a. I had encounters with racial/ class diversity in my professional career.	1	2	3	4	5
6b. I would characterize these encounters with diversity as:	Positive	Neutral	Negative		
7a. I have had or am currently having teaching experiences with diversity.	1	2	3	4	5
7b. I would characterize these experiences with diversity as:	Positive	Neutral	Negative		

## Appendix C: TEACHER SURVEY PAGE 3

### EDUCATIONAL INFORMATION

Check each box that best indicates your current status.

Educational Information	Completed course	Currently enrolled	Completed professional development	No exposure
1. Reading methods				
2. Language acquisition/ development				
3. Linguistic diversity				
4. Children's literature				
5. Cultural diversity				
6. Bilingual education				
7. Special education/ RTI				
8. Curriculum development				
9. Working with struggling readers				

### TEACHING PLACEMENT

List 2-3 areas where you hope to get a job in the future or where you would like to work (if it is different from your current position). Please share why you are interested in these places.

1.

2.

3.